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**THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF  
THOMAS F. TORRANCE  
A CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION**

BY

WEI, JING

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

NEW COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

2013

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been presented to any other academic institution than the University of Edinburgh, to which it is submitted for the award of the degree of doctor of philosophy. It has been composed by myself, and is a result of my own research.

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Jing Wei

2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite tackling theological anthropology in one of his earliest works, this remains a minor theme in the writings of Thomas F. Torrance. Yet his writings are replete with references to the nature of the human person from the perspective of the doctrine of God, creation and the person and work of Christ. This accent upon theology rather than anthropology is intentional in securing a strongly theological and Christological understanding of the person, largely in opposition to more anthropocentric approaches to the knowledge of God. The thesis explores the ways in which his handling of key Christian doctrines shapes his account of the human person as created and redeemed, relational and rational, dependent yet responsible. In particular, his early response to the Barth-Brunner controversy, via the interpretation of Calvin, is analysed before proceeding to his account of the anthropological significance of the vicarious humanity of Christ, the persons of the Trinity and the creation of the world through the divine Logos. To draw Torrance's anthropological conclusions into clearer perspective, a series of comparison with other 20<sup>th</sup> century writers is drawn – Bultmann, Macmurray and Moltmann. What emerges is an appreciative reading of Torrance's theological anthropology as an important resource in terms of its methodology and strong theological orientation, but one which identifies some important lacunae on the particularity of the human creature.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Gratitude is due to many people who have helped in immeasurable ways in this study. The theological insights of my supervisor, Professor David Fergusson, have been profound and invaluable. The result is such a thesis submitted for the PhD in Systematic Theology at New College of the University of Edinburgh.

Dr. Robert Walker and Dr. Frances Henderson contributed to this study through careful reading and unselfish help. At the earlier stage of this research, appreciation must be given to Dr. Paul Nimmo as the second supervisor for his kind advice. At various stages of research, the prayer and support of the Chinese Evangelical Christian Church of Edinburgh were indispensable. Encouragement of many friends, such as Rev. Dr. Carver Yu, Dr. Kang Phee Seng, and Dr. David Peng, was greatly appreciated. Thanks are also due to the administration, faculty, and staff of New College.

Edinburgh, UK

August, 2013

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Theme of the Research

Anthropology is an important subject within Christian theology, but also a subject of particular controversy in modern Protestant thought. Theologians agree that humanity should be understood as made in God's image (i.e. the *imago Dei*), but without much agreement on how to interpret it. A leading theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas F. Torrance tackled theological anthropology in one of his earliest works.<sup>1</sup> Although this was a minor theme in his subsequent writings, these are replete with references to the nature of the human person from the perspective of the doctrine of God, creation and the person and work of Christ. His accent upon theology, rather than anthropology, is intentional in securing a strongly theological and Christological understanding of the person. It approaches anthropology by taking full account of the priority of our knowledge of God. Within this anthropology, humankind "is only an image" in relation to God, and human life "is absolutely reflexive of the action of God, and can be lived only in a motion of continued reflection."<sup>2</sup> To know what the image of God is, we have first to arrive at a proper knowledge of God. For Torrance, humanity as the *imago Dei* is not a state of *being in the likeness of God* but a movement and process in which we can *mirror God*. Human nature rests upon a dynamic reflection of God as

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<sup>1</sup> That is *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 102.

we come to relate to God, rather than the static possession of God's likeness in our being. Moreover, in this relationship God is the ontological source of being and motion while we are merely the reflection of that source. Our identity and situation are fundamentally determined by who God is and how God acts towards us. "Of supreme importance here is the interwovenness of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, for therein consists man's life."<sup>3</sup>

For this reason, Torrance's anthropology intrinsically mingles with the doctrines of God, Christ, salvation and creation. To understand his approach to the human person, we need to take his whole theology into consideration. Research on this topic has usually focused on one particular facet, for instance, the redemption of humanity in Torrance's soteriology.<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive study of his anthropology in the context of his whole theological *oeuvre* has not yet been attempted. This thesis attempts to make the first step in this direction. It will explore Torrance's Christology and soteriology as well as his teachings on the Trinity and creation to understand the ways in which his handling of key Christian doctrines shapes his account of the human person as created and redeemed, relational and rational, dependent yet responsible. In particular, his early response to the Barth-Brunner controversy, via the interpretation of Calvin, will be analysed before proceeding to his account of the anthropological significance of the vicarious humanity of Christ, the persons of the Trinity and the

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 101.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991); Kye Won Lee, *Living in Union with Christ: The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Peter Cass, *Christ Condemned Sin in the Flesh: Thomas F. Torrance's Doctrine of Soteriology and Its Ecumenical Significance* (Saarbrücken: VDM, 2009).

creation of the world through the divine Logos. In order to make his perspective clearer, a series of comparisons with other 20<sup>th</sup> century writers – Bultmann, Macmurray and Moltmann – will be drawn in the discussion. The thesis intends to present an appreciative reading of Torrance’s theological anthropology in terms of its methodology and strong theological orientation, while also pointing more critically to some important lacunae on the particularity of the human creature in his work.

## **1.2 Torrance’s Epistemological Realism**

Before entering into his treatment of Christian doctrine, it is necessary to introduce the epistemological realism which informs Torrance’s theological thinking. Torrance regards theology as a science demanding a scientific approach.<sup>5</sup> His epistemological realism for theological science emphasizes objectivity, revelation and the logic of Christ.

Torrance insists that objectivity is the fundamental principle for all scientific studies. It means that we must know a subject from within itself according to its own nature and “let the nature of what we know determine for us the content and form of our knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> Theology as the science of knowing God has to be in accordance with the nature of God, i.e. the objective truth of who God is in Himself. This requires our reason to make no subjective presupposition but to let the truth prescribe for itself

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<sup>5</sup> This scientific approach to theology led to the award of the distinguished Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1978, the same year that his *Theological Science* was published.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1980), 8.

“both the limits within which it may be known and the mode of rationality that is to be adopted toward it.”<sup>7</sup> Since God transcends all creaturely beings, we cannot truly discover God through studying anything of the world. Unless God reveals Himself, there is no objective knowledge of God. Revelation is “an objective unveiling” of God in which we are brought to a knowledge of God.<sup>8</sup> It is also a personal communication of God addressing to us the Word in person rather than “in abstraction from a Message.”<sup>9</sup> Incarnation embodies such a personal communication uniquely and Christ alone is “the self-giving of God to men.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the logical shape of theology is in the person of Christ as the self-revelation of God. Theology is “systematic only

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “Introduction” to Karl Barth, *Theology and Church, Shorter Writings 1920-1928*. (London: SCM, 1962), 43.

<sup>8</sup> Torrance first expounded this approach to revelation in the Auburn Lectures (1938-9), unpublished. See Alister McGrath’s *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 134–136. Torrance specifies the “Christian Doctrine of Revelation” in the lectures and affirms that alongside an objective unveiling of God there is also “a making of that unveiling real to our vision by taking away of the scales of our eyes which hitherto were too dimmed and diseased to behold the light.” See Auburn Lectures, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: the Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), xxxii. Torrance underlines that revelation “is God speaking in person – *Deus loquentis persona*.” (Auburn Lectures 1938-9, “Christian Doctrine of Revelation”, unpublished manuscript, 52) While the Bible is certainly the Word of God, it is in the manner of the incarnation that God’s Word is conveyed *in person*. For Torrance, the incarnation is the divine revelation as a personal communication of God; the Bible is a witness to revelation – a witness to the incarnate Word, Christ. See again Alister McGrath’s *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 135.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 21. Torrance stresses that in Jesus Christ “the Word has become a physical event in space-time” and “the objective reality of God is intelligibly linked with creaturely and physical forms of thought.” *God and Rationality*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1971), 142; *Space, Time and Incarnation*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), 17.

through correspondence to the nature of Christ himself, and through a doctrinal coherence that grew out of correspondence with the central doctrine of Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

Holding to this epistemological realism, Torrance clearly resists tendencies towards an anthropocentric theology and an independent natural theology. He points out that Protestant theology has a constant temptation “toward subjectivity and inwardness, toward religious experience and self-consciousness,” in which attention is turned inward upon the human self.<sup>12</sup> He criticizes anthropocentric approaches based on human reason and experience – these lack objective foundation for the knowledge of God no matter how appealing they seem.<sup>13</sup> For the same reason, he rejects natural theology. He asserts, “All indirect revelation – as it is called – or all general revelation is confuted by the fact of revelation [i.e. God’s imparting Himself].”<sup>14</sup> Natural

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: the Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), lx.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: the Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), xlviii. Torrance offers his observation on the subjectivism of much Protestant theology in the “Introduction” of this book. For example, he sees in the Westminster Catechisms that “*man’s* glorification of God...occupies most of the picture.” But he also points out, “On the other hand, Protestant theology has always kept returning to the basic principle of the subordination of all tradition to the Word of God and of all its life and thought to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, so that it is constantly being called back out of its subjectivism, out of its monologue with itself, to dialogue with the Word of God.” See xlviii-xlix.

<sup>13</sup> For example, he claims that the whole conception of Schleiermacher’s theology is wrong because its fundamental presuppositions do not match up to the nature of the Christian Gospel and its propositional structure lacks any realist scientific objectivity. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 121.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, the Auburn Lectures (1938-9), “Christian Doctrine of Revelation”, unpublished manuscript, 11. McGrath has observed that “Torrance’s Auburn Lectures of 1938-9...illustrate well the criticisms which Torrance directed against the notion of natural theology at this early stage in his thinking. Torrance here argues that the term ‘revelation’ is to be understood as an affirmation that ‘God does not keep Himself hidden to Himself, wrapped up in His eternal and awful Majesty, but turns towards us in grace and imparts Himself to us in saving revelation’. ... Torrance insists that creation, while being an act of God, is not to be

theology reflects the unthankful and self-willed ambition which does not respect the uniqueness of God's self-giving to us in Christ but thinks that we can know God through our own rational reflection upon nature. "It is clear that the point at issue is that of the impossibility of an independent source of revelation within the natural order, which Torrance regards as quite unacceptable."<sup>15</sup>

In Torrance's eyes, theology has strayed for too long from its scientific nature on account of a dualistic epistemology.<sup>16</sup> As dualism posits a chasm between God and the world, it consequently divides God from His self-revelation in Jesus. He points out, "Dogmatic thinking arises from the fact that God has acted in human history in a final and saving way, and that what He has given us in His revelation is Himself, His own divine being: His Being in His Act; His Act in His Being."<sup>17</sup> This fundamental unitary nature of divine being and action is integral to the Nicene concept of the

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thought of as an act of God in which God imparts himself as a Person. For Torrance, the notion of revelation is specifically linked to an act 'in which God confronts us with His person', in which he 'imparts Himself'. (*Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999, 188.)

<sup>15</sup> Alister McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 188.

<sup>16</sup> Torrance discerns the roots of western theological dualism in Augustine. The recurrence of dualism is apparent in the writings of many later theologians including Aquinas, Kant, and more recently Hans Küng. He also identifies dualism as the common error in many theological trends and heresies, such as Gnosticism, Arianism, nominalism, Hellenism, the Latin heresy, Jewish agnosticism, existentialism, phenomenism, and relativism. His criticism of theological dualism is found in many of his works. See Paul Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 39-43, and Alister McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 142-145.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), 343.

*homoousion*.<sup>18</sup> Without Jesus' *homoousion* with God, the integrity of divine revelation is destroyed. Theological dualism cannot truly understand Jesus Christ as *God and human* in the same person, and finally finds the idea of the incarnation of God within space and time an absurdity. Torrance sees this dualistic epistemology particularly in mediaeval theology. Although he finds that Calvin was able to break free from it, he criticizes some of his followers for relapsing into similarly dualistic modes of thought. It is also manifested in patterns of natural theology, until Barth offered his robust criticism of it on Biblical and scientific grounds.<sup>19</sup> Through his epistemological realism, Torrance opposes such dualistic thinking and affirms the unitary nature of relationship between God and the world/humankind. Its cornerstone is the incarnation.

### 1.3 Torrance's Theological Resources

To understand more clearly Torrance's brand of theological realism, we need further to consider the resources that have proved vital to the expression of his dogmatic theology.

The primary soil for Torrance's theology is found in the writings of the Greek fathers.<sup>20</sup> His interest in their thought since his early years is reflected in his doctoral

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<sup>18</sup> This point is developed in Torrance's essay "The Logic and Analogic of Biblical and Theological Statements in the Greek Fathers", in *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 30-45, especially 34-37.

<sup>19</sup> Refer to Alister E. McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 144. Also cf. *The School of Faith: the Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), xliii-xlix.

<sup>20</sup> It should be stressed that Origen is not among those Greek fathers whose theology Torrance embraces. Torrance also does not show much inclination towards the Latin fathers, such as



research on “The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers”.<sup>21</sup> In his writings, he frequently appeals to Irenaeus, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus to support his arguments.<sup>22</sup> In particular, Torrance is profoundly indebted to Nicene Christology. He is convinced that theology must be built upon a classical Christological foundation, i.e. Christ’s identity as *homoousion* with God. This Christological concept is proclaimed clearly by the Nicene fathers, especially Athanasius, and safeguards the objective foundation of theology. Its rich connotations and implications make discussion of other theological issues both possible and reliable.

As a Reformed theologian, Torrance also owes allegiance to Calvin. He coedited with his brother *Calvin’s Commentaries* for almost a decade.<sup>23</sup> In his eyes, the Reformation revived the central relation of Christ to the Scriptures, and Calvin’s theology showed that “the foundation of true reliance upon God is to know Him in

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Tertullian and Augustine. As McGrath notes, “Torrance tends to stress his indebtedness to Greek patristic theology, rather than the more customary tendency to stress his Augustinian roots.” *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography*, 143-144.

<sup>21</sup> The thesis has been published with the same title in 1996. See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1948).

<sup>22</sup> For example, in the doctrine of the Trinity, Torrance advocates Athanasius’ idea – “It would be more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call Him Father, than to name Him from His works and call Him Unoriginate.” (“Four Discourses Against the Arians”, 1.34, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 4, ed. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, Oxford: James Parker and Company, 1891, 326.) In the doctrine of salvation, Torrance emphasizes Gregory of Nazianzen’s teaching – “which He has not assumed He has not healed.” (“To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius”, letters 101, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 7, ed. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, Oxford: James Parker and Company, 1893, 440.) The English translation used by Torrance is slightly different from this version as we will see in later chapters.

<sup>23</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries*, translated by multiple translators, edited by Thomas F. Torrance and David W. Torrance, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1968.)

Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Many of Calvin’s insights are defended and developed by Torrance. This is particularly evident in some anthropological topics, for instance, the radical nature of sin, the reflection of God’s glory, the saving and sanctifying union of humanity with Christ. In fact, the only book of Torrance which explicitly focuses on anthropology is *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*. As an interpretation of Calvin, this book reveals how Calvin influenced Torrance’s understanding of humankind.<sup>25</sup>

Among modern theologians, Barth is the one who has most influenced Torrance in his approach to epistemology and method in theology. Torrance was particularly exhilarated by Barth’s insights of dogmatics as a science, the objectivity of God’s self-revelation and the Trinitarian account of doctrine.<sup>26</sup> He acknowledges that as he read the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* while still a university student, he was impressed by “the doctrine of the consubstantial communion between the three divine persons in the Holy Trinity” which helped him to “discern something of the ‘inner logic’ or ‘scientific structure’ of dogmatic theology, and to develop its regulative place in my own thinking.”<sup>27</sup> It is no secret that later Torrance undertook his doctoral study with Barth and became the key figure in introducing Barth’s works to

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: the Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), xxi. The quote is from “Calvin’s Geneva Catechism”, question 14. See *The School of Faith*, 7. It is also important to note that “Torrance chooses to place the emphasis upon Calvin’s positive relationship with Greek patristic Christianity” but avoids “representing the Reformation as a recovery of Augustinianism.” (Alister E. McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography*, 153.)

<sup>25</sup> This will be developed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>26</sup> Refer to Thomas F. Torrance’s “My Interaction with Karl Barth” in *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 121.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “Itinerarium Mentis in Deum: My Theological Development”, unpublished manuscript, 17.

the English-speaking world.<sup>28</sup> Barth's theology particularly inspired and convinced Torrance to structure his dogmatic system with a single focus on Christ's revelation. In Torrance's view, this not only developed and sustained the central themes of orthodox Christianity but enabled a recovery of the unitary foundation of theology. He identifies a group of theologians, including Athanasius, Calvin and Barth as the main figures, who developed "a unitary [anti-dualist] approach to the Christian faith", so that there emerged in Torrance's reading of the history of theology "a direct continuity (both verbal and substantial) between Athanasius, Calvin and Barth, which is of central importance to the interaction of theology and the natural sciences."<sup>29</sup> For Torrance, Barth is the one who recovered the epistemological significance of the *homousion* in Athanasius and rescued the Reformed heritage of Calvin by adhering to God's Word alone.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> He coedited the English translation of *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1961, 1969). And he also published several articles and books on Barth. For instance, "Karl Barth", *Expository Times* 66 (1955); *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (London: SCM, 1962); "Karl Barth and Patristic Theology", *Theology beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth*, (ed.), John Thomson (Allison Park: Pickwick, 1986).

<sup>29</sup> Alister McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 143, 145.

<sup>30</sup> It is clear that Torrance appreciates Barth not in isolation but within a long tradition of theological writing. Although Barth's impact cannot be contested, as McGrath comments, he is by no means "an uncritical disciple of Barth". His published writings up to about 1955 do not obviously reflect a devotion to Barth, though he applies Barth's ideas and cites his work frequently in his Auburn Lectures (1938-9). Having the highest regard for Barth, he nevertheless differs from Barth on some key issues, for example Barth's alleged failure to deal adequately with "the doctrine of a living union with Jesus Christ" ("Karl Barth", *Expository Times* 66, 1955, 209). For a later formulation of this and other criticisms, see *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 131-133. See also Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 7-8, and Alister E. McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: an Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 136-138.

In addition to the Greek fathers, Calvin and Barth, the influence of Scottish theology should also be noted.<sup>31</sup> Torrance recalled that since his early years as a student he had been “impressed with the Scottish realist tradition.”<sup>32</sup> It alerted him to the error of dualism, which in his eyes “seemed to eat away the edges of thought,” and also enabled him to start practicing his “decisive epistemological and scientific thinking” to criticize the naturalistic fallacy.<sup>33</sup> When he was a student at the University of Edinburgh, a few teachers exercised a strong effect upon the development of his theology. The best known are Hugh Ross Mackintosh and Daniel Lamont. Mackintosh emphasized “the union of the believer with Christ” and used it to overcome “the harsh effects of exclusively forensic approaches to the work of Christ.”<sup>34</sup> In his theology, “all Christianity comes down to two companion truths – God in Christ for us, and we in Christ for God.”<sup>35</sup> Such an opinion apparently projected a deep imprint on Torrance’s mind and prompted a close attention to the theme of “union with Christ” in his own theology. Mackintosh also highly valued the unique revelation of Christ which rests upon the exclusive mutual knowing between the Father and the Son as well as the full reality of deity in Christ. This is also echoed in Torrance’s theology.

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<sup>31</sup> David Fergusson points out that, “Tom Torrance was a Scottish theologian. ... Nevertheless, in most of what has been written about Torrance too little has been made of his Scottish context.” See “Torrance as a Scottish Theologian”, *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, vol. 2 (2010), 77, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “Itinerarium Mentis in Deum: My Theological Development”, unpublished manuscript, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “Itinerarium Mentis in Deum: My Theological Development”, unpublished manuscript, 6.

<sup>34</sup> David Fergusson, “Torrance as a Scottish Theologian”, *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, vol. 2 (2010), 81.

<sup>35</sup> David Fergusson, “Torrance as a Scottish Theologian”, *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, vol. 2 (2010), 82.

Lamont, by contrast, was the one who “helped to generate Torrance’s interest in science and in applying the scientific method to theology in the sense that knowledge was perceived to take place when thinking was conformed to the unique nature of the object being investigated.”<sup>36</sup> Lamont himself engaged in scientific reflection on the truths of the Christian faith and rejected the dualist Newtonian and Kantian notions of time. He believed that “there was important apologetic work to be done in showing the consistency of Christian faith with the best insights of other disciplines.”<sup>37</sup> He also believed that scientific work on theology must take place from within faith and proceed from the revelation in Christ, so that the subjectivity and initiative of God are respected. In some ways, his thought adumbrates Torrance’s later work. Moreover, Torrance is also influenced by John Macmurray, a Scottish philosopher who became Torrance’s colleague in Edinburgh from 1960. Macmurray advocated understanding “the self as agent” and “persons in relation”.<sup>38</sup> His relational thinking of personhood is sharply different from more individualist and Cartesian approaches to the self. Torrance commends Macmurray’s thought enthusiastically in *Theological Science*<sup>39</sup> and applies it with good effect in his theology.<sup>40</sup> It seems that Torrance’s theology is “reinforced by epistemological arguments that drew from Macmurray.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 5.

<sup>37</sup> David Fergusson, “Torrance as a Scottish Theologian”, *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, vol. 2 (2010), 84.

<sup>38</sup> See John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

<sup>39</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> In the doctrine of the Trinity, Torrance has the Trinitarian Persons very well illustrated by the notion of “persons in relation”. His anthropology also depends on it. Actually relational

In sum, Torrance's scientific theology based on a realist epistemology has its background and context in his own education and career. Although people tend to associate him primarily with Barth, there are in fact a large number of theologians and philosophers, in both ancient and modern times, whose work constitutes a grand matrix that generated and shaped Torrance's theology. "It is this configuration of influences that enabled Torrance to move beyond Karl Barth in some important respects."<sup>42</sup> When we examine his anthropology through his systematic theology, we need to keep in mind its sources and background, so that we can gain a comprehensive understanding of him. So also, when we assess Torrance's anthropology, we need to position him in the broad context of these aforementioned theologies to recognise its strengths and weaknesses.

## 1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

The body of this thesis contains four chapters followed by a conclusion. We will first approach the subject from a detailed study of *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (1949). As Torrance's only book on the doctrine of humanity and one of his earliest publications, this book provides us with a starting point from which to approach his anthropology. In this chapter (Chapter Two) on *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, we will describe the basic

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thinking shines through his theology. We will observe this character in the whole thesis, particularly in Chapter 4.

<sup>41</sup> David Fergusson, "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian", *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, vol. 2 (2010), 85.

<sup>42</sup> David Fergusson, "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian", *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, vol. 2 (2010), 82.

orientation of Torrance's anthropology via his interpretation of Calvin and his response to the Barth-Brunner controversy. The following chapter (Chapter Three) will explore Torrance's Christology and soteriology in which his most insightful arguments about humanity can be discerned in his illustration of the person and work of Christ. To a significant degree, the substance of his anthropology emerges from his Christology and soteriology. Thereafter, in Chapter Four we will look at Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity. Known as a Trinitarian theologian, Torrance takes the Trinitarian Persons as the archetype for interpreting human persons in relation. This chapter will unfold the transcendent foundation of his anthropology. Thereafter, Chapter Five will examine Torrance's doctrine of creation. It gives another axis, subordinate to the soteriological axis, to locate the knowledge of humankind on his theological map. It will be argued that the intrinsic and unresolved tension of his anthropology is generated by these two different axes. The structure of this thesis itself reflects the presentation of Torrance's anthropology: his anthropology starts not from creation but from the salvific revelation of Jesus Christ as he unfolds in his person the true character of the human being. It is the knowledge of God in Christ that enables human self-knowledge. To know ourselves, we must first know Christ.

## Chapter 2

### Torrance's *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*

*Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (CDOM) is among Torrance's earliest publications. It is his only book on the doctrine of humanity as such. It is also one of the few full-length studies of Calvin's anthropology that have been published<sup>1</sup> and is a good starting point from which to approach Torrance's position on theological anthropology in the Reformed tradition.

CDOM was composed in 1947 and published in 1949. It referred to the memorable controversy between Brunner and Barth during the 1930s and 1940s. As is generally known, the controversy arose from the debate on the validity of natural theology. The landmark publication was Brunner's *Nature and Grace* which was responded to by Barth's *No!* in 1934. Their disagreement centred on the revelation of God and the rationality of human beings. The debate illustrated a major concern of 20<sup>th</sup> century theology in its wrestling against the anthropocentrism prevalent in 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal theology. It also highlighted a grave challenge that modern theological anthropology needs to answer, how to understand humanity from the standpoint of a theocentric theology. CDOM was Torrance's response to the Brunner-Barth

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988). In the "Introduction" Engel introduces Torrance's CDOM as "the only full-length study" published in this area at the time of her writing. Cf. the endnote 2 of "Introduction", iv and xii-xiii.



controversy and represented his first effort to answer the challenge posed to theocentric theology.

In this chapter we will first look at the anthropological issues raised by the Brunner-Barth controversy and consider *CDOM* as Torrance's response to them. Then we will examine *CDOM* in terms of how Torrance interpreted Calvin. From these two sections, we will then proceed to examine Torrance's interpretation of Calvin through the lens of Barth.

## **2.1 Torrance's Response to the Brunner-Barth Controversy**

### **2.1.1 The Controversy**

The controversy can be sketched out as follows: Brunner believes that God reveals His preserving grace in nature and that humankind is capable of recognizing His revelation using human rationality. For Brunner we can gain some knowledge of God through studying the natural world and therefore natural theology has a certain validity. Barth responds with an absolute "No!" to this idea. He believes that God's revelation only becomes knowable as salvation in Christ and through the Spirit. After the Fall humankind has no means by which to apprehend it with their corrupted rationality. Natural theology has no legitimacy because it is incapable of leading sinners to the divine salvation in Christ.

Anthropologically, the controversy raised a key issue about humanity as the *imago Dei*, whether there is the remnant of an image, a "remnant image" in fallen

humankind. This corresponds to another important question, what does salvation mean in terms of restoring God's image in humanity?

Brunner recognizes a formal "remnant" of God's image in sinners due to their retaining a capacity for reason. He explains that humankind is singled out by God to *respond* to Him, namely to *image* Him. Their rational capacity is "the presupposition of responsibility"<sup>2</sup> and something they have in common with God. Sinners have lost God's image in the material sense, but in the formal sense they retain a rationality and hence the possibility of being addressed by God's word and of responding to it. Conscience is "the consciousness of responsibility", and even a sinner has "a conscience, in which the law of God is indelibly and irremovably implanted".<sup>3</sup> Humankind after the Fall still has "an inclination towards truth and a capacity for recognizing truth".<sup>4</sup> In this formal sense, therefore, the remnant image of God in them should be affirmed. This also affirms that salvation is the restoration of the *imago Dei* in which humankind was *originally* created. In other words for Brunner, the new creation cannot be regarded simply as Barth does as one that "is in no wise a perfection of the old, but comes into being exclusively through destruction of the old and is a replacement of the old man by the new."<sup>5</sup> For Brunner it is the restoration of the original creation.

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<sup>2</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology*, consists of "Nature and Grace" by Emil Brunner and "No!" by Karl Barth, (London: Centenary, 1946), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 42.

<sup>4</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 21.

Barth firmly rejects the concept of the remnant image. His protest stands on the ground of salvation in Christ alone. He argues that the so-called formal image, the capacity for reason, has no relevance for salvation and to presume that human reason is the basis for salvation is as absurd as proclaiming that one can be saved from drowning because one is a man and not a lump of lead.<sup>6</sup> After the Fall, the right use of reason should lead us only to “despair” of finding God’s image in humanity. If a sinner can respond to God, it is because of the mysterious work of the Spirit. The fact that God can make His Word known to humankind is “due to something other than the formal possibility”,<sup>7</sup> that is, the rational possibility of being addressed by God. This further demonstrates that the new creation of humanity “can be no question of a capacity for repair on the part of man” but rather “a *miracle* performed upon man”.<sup>8</sup> Such a miracle presupposes nothing from the human side and brings into being “a new creature” in place of the old.<sup>9</sup> It is in this whole new sense that humanity is restored to be the *imago Dei*.

In the debate, Brunner and Barth both appealed to Calvin and claimed to be in agreement with his teaching.<sup>10</sup> Their divergence actually reflects two different directions in Calvin’s theology regarding the extent of human knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 79.

<sup>7</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 89.

<sup>8</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 93.

<sup>9</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 93-94.

<sup>10</sup> Barth and Brunner were both Reformed theologians in the general sense, but not Calvinist in the particular sense.

<sup>11</sup> We will look at Calvin’s “inconsistent” argument on anthropology in the next section.

Brunner agrees with Calvin in affirming human rationality and conscience and arguing that they distinguish humans from other creatures and confer unique status on humanity as the bearer of God's image in both creation and salvation. Possessing reason and conscience also means that humans are held culpable for sin and need to repent from it. This line of thinking calls our attention to the distinctiveness and subjectivity or subjecthood of human nature.<sup>12</sup>

Barth echoes Calvin in underlining the radical depravity of human nature and justification solely by Christ's atonement. To attribute any credit to the human side is to deny God's sheer grace and sufficient salvation in Christ. This direction of thought makes us see our powerlessness and hopelessness for self-justification and so means that we are urged to humble ourselves and turn to faith in Christ.

The two directions are both found in the Bible. They represent the high view and the low view of humanity, its nobility and its humility, both of which we actually experience in real life. The fierce disagreement between Brunner and Barth, nevertheless involves more than the issue of how to explain the biblical views of humanity. As John Hart points out, this famous debate is "neither a careful exegesis nor a dogmatic discussion" but the confrontation between several issues determinative for theology, such as "the understanding of dialectic and revelation, the relationship of theology and philosophy, the place of anthropology in theology and the task of

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<sup>12</sup> Distinctiveness implies possession and subjectivity activity. In other words, the uniqueness of human nature has both static and dynamic elements. In a certain sense, the controversy is about the question of "what human being is, and by what its uniqueness is constituted". (Joan E. O'Donovan, "Man in the Image of God: the Disagreement between Barth and Brunner Reconsidered", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 39, 1986, 433.)

theology”.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, the controversy involves differing methodological concerns behind the various doctrinal inclinations and positions.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.1.2 The Methodical Difference

Brunner and Barth have a quite different understanding of theology and hence a different method of constructing it. Briefly speaking, Brunner’s thinking is concerned with the *mutual relation* between God and humanity, Barth’s with the *central focus* of theology in Christ.

Brunner regards theology as inherently relational, concerned with “the divine-human encounter” and disclosing “the relation of God to men and of men to God”.<sup>15</sup> He points out that what happens in the relation is that God reveals Himself and humankind receives His revelation through an act of response. This does not mean that humankind has autonomy independent from God, but that God places humankind as “a creature face to face with Himself, a creature who in having the power of knowing and acknowledging has a share in the essential nature of God, namely, in being a subject.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore humankind has a ‘subjectivity’ or ‘subjecthood’ which reflects that of God like a mirror. Such reflecting subjectivity is endowed on human beings according to God’s will in creation, and is also demanded by God from humankind in

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<sup>13</sup> John W. Hart, *Karl Barth Vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 167.

<sup>14</sup> As widely known, the eruption of the controversy was closely related to the German Church struggle with Nazism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore it also involved some of the political concerns of that historical context. This chapter only provides a brief introduction to their different ways of viewing and constructing theology.

<sup>15</sup> Emil Brunner *The Divine-Human Encounter* (London: S.C.M., 1944), 31.

<sup>16</sup> Emil Brunner *The Divine-Human Encounter* (London: S.C.M., 1944), 39.

salvation in that we need to *voluntarily* respond to God's love revealed in Christ. Based on such a relational way of thinking, Brunner finds it necessary to affirm human subjecthood within God's initiative of creation and salvation. In so doing, Brunner intentionally eliminates the subject-object antithesis between God and humankind in theology, replacing it with the Subject-subject relation.

Barth does not begin by thinking from the relational perspective. For him, theology should focus on the mystery of God who reveals Himself in Christ alone. Christ's revelation and salvation give the definitive answer to all theological questions. On the one hand, Christ *is* God, that is, he is himself the reality of what he reveals. On the other hand, Christ is solely elected by God to have partnership with Him as a human and therefore he is the only human being in real relation to God. As true God and true human, Christ discloses all knowledge about God, humanity and the God-human relationship. Christ the incarnate God must be recognized as the *only* subject who both reveals as well as receives God's revelation. We human beings can in no way be true subjects even when we receive the divine revelation through faith. This is because even our faith "does not rest on itself...but on what is quite other than itself [i.e. Christ's faith], by which its own emptiness is filled."<sup>17</sup> In Barth's eyes, Christ should exclusively occupy the central position from where the whole content of theology radiates. Such theology is commonly known as Christocentrism and it is by promoting Christocentrism that Barth intends to make a thorough revision of anthropocentric theology.

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<sup>17</sup> Alasdair I. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (Guildford: Lutterworth, 1980), 87.

It is important to clarify that Brunner and Barth both disapprove of liberal theology. Behind their differences therefore, there should also be recognized their common effort to correct its anthropocentric error. As is widely known, they were two of the leading lights in the movement of dialectical theology based on God's revelation rather than on human reason.<sup>18</sup> They shared the common aim of restoring the orthodox teaching of the Church fathers and Calvin through their "re-stating of the main classical Christian doctrines, especially of Christology, in which they believed the meaning and content of the revelation was explicated."<sup>19</sup> There was no problem for them to agree on God as Subject and on Christ's centrality in the general picture of theology. Their disagreement centres mainly on the subjectivity of humankind, on *whether humanity should also be affirmed as a subject in theocentric and Christ-based theology*. McGrath has aptly summarised their divergence from liberal theology as follows:

Liberal Theology: God as *object*, humanity as *subject*.

Brunner: God as *subject*, humanity as *subject*.

Barth: God as *subject*, humanity as *object*.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, the controversy distinguishes Barth and Brunner sharply on the doctrine of humankind but not on the doctrine of God and it is reasonable to believe

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<sup>18</sup> Dialectical theology emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a vital movement against the liberal theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which had elevated human reason over revelation.

<sup>19</sup> Alasdair I. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (Guildford: Lutterworth, 1980), 81.

<sup>20</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 105. Barth would no doubt wish to qualify the way his theology is characterised by McGrath here. See further footnote 22 below.

that this helped motivate Torrance to respond to the controversy with *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*.

### 2.1.3 Torrance's Response

Before we examine *CDOM* as Torrance's interpretation of Calvin, let us first look at it as his response to the Brunner-Barth controversy. The book has twelve chapters. The chart below gives a summary of the main motifs.<sup>21</sup>

1 Man's Knowledge of Himself	The self-knowledge is reflexive of divine knowledge and gained through responding to the Word.
2 Man's Place in Creation	Humankind is created endowed with intelligence to be the distinctive creature in God's image.
3 The Image of God (1)	The <i>imago Dei</i> indicates that humankind reflects God's glory particularly by their intelligible response to the Word.
4 The Image of God (2)	A more precise knowledge of the <i>imago Dei</i> comes from Christ's salvation which reveals the image as a spiritual reflection of God in knowledge and response.
5 The Image of God (3)	The <i>imago Dei</i> means a dynamic and continuous relationship in which human beings actively obey God.

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<sup>21</sup> At the beginning of each chapter, Torrance has provided a summary account of its contents, making it easier and more accurate to summarise his thought. These are condensed for the sake of clarity and brevity. In order to make the thesis shorter and its focus clearer, here we condense Torrance's account and select those points that present only Torrance's own conclusive opinion rather than his explanatory argument about Calvin. It is to be noted that a number of the quotations referenced below are from Torrance's summary accounts rather than from the body of his text.



6 The Image of God (4)	The <i>imago Dei</i> fundamentally refers to God's beholding humankind with a fatherly eye and hence is not to be regarded as something innate in human natural being.
7 Total Perversity (1)	Humanity's total depravity is inferred from Christ's total salvation. Calvin has a problem with the concept of the complete defacement of the <i>imago Dei</i> in fallen humanity.
8 Total Perversity (2)	The complete defacement of the <i>imago Dei</i> is due to the total perversion of the human relationship to God.
9 The Sin of Mind	After the Fall, the human mind only functions over against God's will by self-will.
10 The Mind's Knowledge of God	How humankind knows God is a mystery of the Spirit which is ungrounded on any natural capacity of the mind.
11 Natural Theology (1)	Natural theology is invalid because the order of creation has been perverted and the human mind is blind after the Fall.
12 Natural Theology (2)	The Word is necessary for knowing God even before the Fall. There is no knowledge of God apart from Christ's atonement.

It is not difficult to discern that in *CDOM* Torrance echoed both Brunner and Barth. Judging by the vocabulary, chapters 1~3 are quite Brunner-like while chapters 7~12 are Barth-like and chapters 4~6 are in the middle. On going deeper into the content, we can see more clearly just what Torrance has taken from both Brunner's and Barth's teachings.

In a manner similar to Brunner, Torrance puts forward a relational way of thinking about theological anthropology.<sup>22</sup> He unfolds the doctrine of humanity under the God-human relationship. A concept running throughout the book is that humanity does not stand by itself but only by its reflecting of God. Agreeing with Brunner, Torrance explains the reflection as one involving the intellect, as humanity's intelligent response to God. Humanity as the *imago Dei* is defined by a conscious relationship of response. This clearly presupposes the endowment of intelligence and the capacity to be subjects which distinguishes humankind from other creatures. By underlining the intelligent response and responsibility of humankind, Torrance supports to a certain extent Brunner's affirmation of a rational capacity which marks the existence of the *imago Dei* at least in a formal sense.

Yet on the other hand, Torrance agrees firmly with Barth about humanity's total loss of the *imago Dei* after the Fall. He explains that from the God-human relational perspective fallen human beings have lost the image because their intelligence willfully perverts the *imago*-relation rather than fulfils it. Instead of responding to God, their intelligent ability only alienates them from God. Without

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<sup>22</sup> A clarification that must be made here is that in this thesis, Brunner's '*relational*' thinking is understood as indicating a relevantly stricter use and meaning of 'relational' in speaking about the connection between God and human beings, namely a *mutual interaction* of the God-humanward movement *and* the human-Godward movement where both are *necessary* as well as *active*. (Please refer to the preceeding section of this chapter that explains Brunner's theological system as being characterized by the *subject-subject* type of God-human encounter.) Barth also thinks of humanity in terms of the relation between God and humankind and therefore also has a kind of relational thinking. Clearly however, his 'relational' thinking is different from (if not opposite to) Brunner's. What Barth emphasizes is the dominant character of God's initiative with and over humankind rather than the mutual character of interaction between God and human beings. In order to distinguish the two types of 'relational' thinking and keep the expression simple, this thesis uses the phrases *relational thinking* or *relational framework* exclusively in the Brunnerian sense.

denying the significant role of intelligence in the God-human relationship, Torrance clarifies Barth's opinion and strengthens it by pointing out that their intelligent ability actually worsens humanity's relation to God and causes the defacement of the image. The formal sense of the *imago Dei* that Brunner ascribes to human rationality is thus undermined. This also justifies Barth's assertion that knowing God is a mystery of the Spirit. In other words, there is no involvement of any power of intelligence from the human side and it is *only* by the secret and wondrous power of the Spirit that we receive and understand the knowledge of God.

Torrance also sides with Barth in acknowledging the *imago Dei* in Christ alone. He asserts Christ's salvation as "the reparation of man's corrupt nature" and hence as "a more precise knowledge of the *imago Dei*".<sup>23</sup> Through his atonement Christ restored the God-human relationship and revealed the truth of *imago*-relation to be one of spiritual reflection in action rather than a natural property of the human soul. Taking a further step, Torrance then asserts that Christ's salvation is the only revelation of God, stating that "there never was since the beginning any communication between God and man, except through Christ."<sup>24</sup> Torrance here not only rejects natural theology but also affirms Christocentrism for anthropology.

#### **2.1.4 Critique of Torrance's Response**

Generally viewed, Torrance seems to have made a Brunnerian start but a Barthian conclusion in *CDOM*. Regarding human nature as the *imago Dei*, he started with

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 52.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 169.

emphasizing the intelligent distinctiveness and reflective subjectivity or subjecthood of humankind, but concluded with rejecting any intelligent participation and subjective involvement from the human side. This is criticized by Barth as “a happy inconsistency” which he thinks many Protestant theologians have made in their theological methods.<sup>25</sup> The rich implications of Barth’s critique are not the focus of this thesis. Nevertheless, Barth calls our attention to the important fact that Torrance faces a methodological tension in his theological anthropology between relational and Christocentric ways of thinking. The former examines humanity through a bifocal lens which views humankind as being relatively independent from God;<sup>26</sup> the latter examines humanity through a single-focal lens concentrating on Christ in whom humanity and God are one. As a consequence, the former gives anthropology a relatively independent position in the whole picture, while the latter subsumes it completely under Christology.

In terms of basic Christian belief, these two ways of thinking do not contradict one another as the orthodox versus the heretical, but in terms of theological methodology do contrast each other as the old versus the new. This is acknowledged

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<sup>25</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1956), IV.1, 367. In Barth’s eyes, Torrance’s relational interpretation of humanity is still trapped by the “methodical weakness” of the “older Protestant orthodoxy” which failed to concentrate on Christ radically. Barth points to the issue of sin in particular. Regarding Torrance’s analysis of Calvin on “Total Perversity”, Barth takes issue with Torrance that he talks about “Total Perversity” first in the context of God’s general grace without focusing on Christ and then appeals to the Christocentric perspective. He comments, “It seems doubtful to me whether we can agree with T. F. Torrance in his fine book, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, 1949, p. 83 f. ...that with Calvin the doctrine of the corruption of man is a corollary of the doctrine of grace.” See the same page.

<sup>26</sup> This does not mean a parallel equality of humankind to God in terms of autonomy. To allow at least some room for relative human independence is to make the God-human interaction discernible.

by Barth when he criticizes the “methodical weakness” of the “old Protestant orthodoxy” stemming from Calvin.<sup>27</sup> As Barth points out,

Reformation theology did not allow for any radical consideration of the meaning, importance and function of Christology in relation to all Christian knowledge. For that reason this theology was in many spheres – with illuminating exceptions – able to think and argue from Christology only very indirectly and implicitly, or not at all.<sup>28</sup>

There is simply a general antithesis: God on the one hand and man on the other. It is simply maintained that this antithesis breaks through man’s self-deception and gives a genuine self-knowledge. ...he [Calvin] seems to have regarded it as self-evident that for the moment we cannot and ought not to speak of man in his confrontation with Jesus Christ. For this reason, his account of the encounter with God and its effect is not altogether dissimilar to...the experience of man – even non-Christian man – in relation to the *fascinosum* of the Wholly Other.<sup>29</sup>

Actually this “methodical weakness” as it was described by Barth had appeared even earlier in patristic theology. The Church fathers did not regard anthropology as only a bye product of Christology, or always treat the doctrine of sin as a corollary of the doctrine of grace. While they maintained the orthodox understanding of God’s revelation in Christ, they had not yet developed a radical understanding of Christology as the single focus for all other doctrines. Christocentrism is Barth’s further development in theological methodology from the tradition of the Church fathers and Calvin and to a certain degree it defines the neo-orthodox trend initiated by Barth himself. The contrast between the two ways of

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<sup>27</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1956), IV.1, 367.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1956), IV.1, 366.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1956), IV.1, 367.

thinking, the relational and the Christocentric, ultimately manifests the tension between the old orthodoxy and new orthodoxy which are far from being identical.

Influenced by both as he is, Torrance has to inevitably negotiate the tension between them. His starting with Brunner and concluding with Barth in *CDOM* reflects his struggle to hold the old and the new together. This brings us to observe a critical character of his book *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, that Torrance interprets Calvin through the lens of Barth.

## **2.2 Torrance's Interpretation of Calvin**

In order to examine Torrance's interpretation of Calvin, we need first to look briefly at Calvin's theology as a whole.

### **2.2.1 Calvin's Theology**

It is well known that Calvin regards our knowledge of self as dependent on our knowledge of God, our own self-knowing dependent on our knowing God. This is often misunderstood as meaning that Calvin only focuses on knowledge of God.<sup>30</sup> In

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Charles Partee once talked about Calvin's *Institutes* like this: "Doubtless, in a general way, Calvin discusses (1) our created nature in Book I, (2) our fallen nature in Book II, and (3) our redeemed nature in Book III, However, the main subject in each case is God, not man. ... The point is that Calvin is expounding theology, not anthropology." (*The Theology of John Calvin*, London: Westminster John Knox, 2008, 82.) Obviously, *theology* here indicates "the knowledge of God" since it is used in contrast to *anthropology*. Such a statement rightly affirms God as the supreme 'Subject' in all human knowledge of him, but it could mislead readers into a bias that Calvin's theology only focuses on God and is ultimately only about God. As Mary Potter Engel has cogently pointed out, "In fact, most of the references to the intimate connection Calvin draws between God-knowledge and self-knowledge in the opening sentences of the *Institutes* are made somewhat hastily on the way to discussions of the more

fact, Calvin also maintains that, “we cannot have a clear and complete knowledge of God unless it is accompanied by a corresponding knowledge of ourselves.”<sup>31</sup> A better way to understand Calvin’s theology would therefore be that it expounds knowledge of God in the light of knowledge of humankind and knowledge of humankind in the light of God. Focusing on the co-relation of the two, Calvin’s theology is not ontological speculation about God apart from ourselves as creaturely human beings, but a relational examination of God in real relation to us, in short, as “God with us”.

Regarding the realist connection between God and humankind, “Calvin’s thought has its whole existence within the realm of God as revealer and man as knower.”<sup>32</sup> One of the principal concepts employed by Calvin to illustrate the revealing-knowing connection is “*accommodation*”. Calvin points out in *Institutes* 1.13.1 that God must “accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity”.<sup>33</sup>

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substantive and important ‘theological’ doctrines such as Christology, Soteriology, or Pneumatology. For this reason the significance of Calvin’s pairing of God-knowledge and self-knowledge has not been properly understood or appreciated.” (*John Calvin’s Perspectival Anthropology*, Atlanta: Scholars, 1988, iv.)

<sup>31</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.15.1 (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, London: SCM, 1961), 183. Torrance has referred to and properly interpreted such statements as follows, “By this he [Calvin] does not mean that anthropology of itself can contribute to or condition our knowledge of God, but that *unless there arises within our knowledge of God a real knowledge of man our knowledge of God itself is not real.*” (CDOM, 13, italics added.)

<sup>32</sup> Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994; first published 1952), 3.

<sup>33</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.1 (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, London: SCM, 1961), 121. The idea is also mentioned in other places in his works. For example, in *Commentary on Exodus*, 3:2, Calvin comments, “For thus we believe that God, as often as he appeared of old to the holy patriarchs, descended in some way (*descendisse quodammodo*) from his loftiness, that he might reveal himself as far as was useful and as far as their comprehension would admit.” In *Commentary on Daniel*, 7:9, Calvin comments, “As therefore our capacity cannot endure the fullness of the infinite glory which belongs to the essence of God, it is necessary whenever he appears to us that he put on a form

This means that in order to make Himself knowable to us, God reveals Himself in a manner adapted to our ability to comprehend Him. Otherwise we could not possibly know God who infinitely transcends us. Calvin considers accommodation as a prerequisite for the revealing-knowing connection in which God-knowledge and self-knowledge are both conveyed. The wide-ranging importance of the concept of accommodation is well recognised by Calvin scholars: “accommodation [has been] discussed in relation to a wide range of divine activities. It was, from early on, used to delineate the character of divine revelation generally”,<sup>34</sup> “The ‘knowledge of God’ is therefore always man’s knowledge of God’s revelation (according to the principle of accommodation) and the very revelation of God always in a radical way implies man’s self-knowledge (according to the principle of correlation).”<sup>35</sup>

Another important concept for understanding the connection between God and humankind as expounded by Calvin is “*duplex cognitio*”, the *two-fold knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer*.<sup>36</sup> It implies a corresponding twofold knowledge of

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adapted to our capacity. ...he continually put on various appearances, according to man’s comprehension, to whom he wished to give some signs of his presence.” The connotation of accommodation in Calvin’s theology will not be expounded in detail here. For more information, refer to Jon Balserak’s *Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 13-21. The same concept is also employed by patristic authors (e.g. Augustine and Irenaeus). G.R. Evans’s *The Language and Logic of the Bible: the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984), 1-10 may help with understanding this idea used in an age earlier than Calvin.

<sup>34</sup> Jon Balserak’s *Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 16.

<sup>35</sup> Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994; first published 1952), 24.

<sup>36</sup> Calvin’s systematic theology, according to his *Institutes*, is often recognized as a picture of “*duplex cognitio*” (two kinds of knowledge). There is some disagreement about the structure of the *Institutes*. The final edition (1559) rearranged the ordering of material and came out as a four-book volume. Put briefly, Book I is on Creation, Book II on Redemption, Book III on the



humankind as *created and redeemed* by God. That is to say, Calvin recognized two kinds of interaction of God with humankind based on the two narratives of creation and redemption in which he unfolds the divine revelation of God-knowledge and self-knowledge. Anthropologically, the former, knowledge of God and knowledge of self in *creation*, reveals the distinct nobility of a humanity in God's image; the latter, knowledge of God and self in *redemption*, reveals the complete corruption of a humanity which has lost God's image and is redeemed through Christ. For Calvin, the *imago Dei* therefore consists of the two elements of our being created in and then redeemed back into the *imago Dei*.

Worthy of notice is that Calvin's anthropological arguments have some ambiguity and inconsistency. As many scholars find, Calvin talks about human reason quite differently in creation and salvation. On the one hand, he affirms reason as the distinctive reflection of God in humanity; on the other hand, he stresses the willful rebellion of human reason against God. In the first situation, reason in the context of creation distinguishes humankind as being in God's image; in the second situation, the

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Holy Spirit, and Book IV on the Church. The four Books echo the four parts of the Apostle's Creed. The title of Book III does not mention the Spirit, and the doctrine of the Spirit proper is divided between Books I and III. According to Edward Dowey, "this division corresponds to what Calvin conceived of as the two kinds of revelation: the revelation of God as Creator, and as Redeemer. Book I of the 1559 edition represents the former, and the whole remainder of the work represents the latter." For this reason, Dowey alleges that Calvin's theology is structured by the two kinds of knowledge (*duplex cognitio domini*) of God as Creator and God as Redeemer. (*The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 41ff.) However, some other scholars disagree with Dowey. For instance, T. H. L. Parker criticizes Dowey for imposing the *duplex cognitio Dei* upon and destroying the unity of the *Institutes*. In Parker's eyes, the real *duplex cognitio* that the *Institutes* reflects is the knowledge of God and the self. (*Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, revised edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 117-121.) Here, without focusing on discussion of the disagreement, the thesis uses Dowey's opinion to facilitate an introduction to the explicit flow of Calvin's theology in the *Institutes*.

function of reason in the context of salvation has been turned upside-down, but human beings must be regarded as the image-bearer nonetheless. These differing if not conflicting situations pose the question: what is the significance of reason as it affects humanity as the bearer of God's image? Or, what is the connection between having reason and being in God's image? Calvin does not answer the question fully but leaves it in some ambiguity. He also acknowledges the existence of conscience and regards it as the light of God sparkling in sinners. This seems to affirm some remnant of the positive function of reason after the Fall and clearly increases the ambiguity, heightening the controversy over the issue of "the remnant image".<sup>37</sup>

### 2.2.2 Torrance's Interpretation of Calvin

In *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Torrance arranges his study around the theme of the *imago Dei* and with the concept of the *duplex cognitio* in mind. It is clear that he approaches the theme from the creation context and then moves to the salvation context. The twelve chapters may be broadly summarized as below:<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The disagreement between Barth and Brunner reflects their diverse interpretations of Calvin on this issue in particular, but it widely puts some other basic teachings of Reformed theology into debate also, for instance, the issues of *faith* and *grace*. While Reformed theologians agree on the teaching of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, their understandings of the nature of faith and the content of grace are not identical. As Balserak indicates, the Barth-Brunner debate reminds us that "Calvin scholarship has wrestled long and hard with the reformer's views even on basic issues" and "it seems that the matter is far from being closed." (*Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006, 36-37.)

<sup>38</sup> Section (b) clearly corresponds with the creation context while (d) and (e) correspond with the salvation context. In section (c), Torrance discusses the *imago Dei* in the context of Christ's salvation as well as in the context of *creatio continua* (i.e. the continuous creation). For the purposes of the thesis, therefore, it is appropriate to single out section (c). It manifests the essence of Torrance's interpretation of the *imago Dei* according to Calvin, and offers the critical key to unfolding his own anthropology.

(a)	Chapter 1	the basic rationale of Christian anthropology
(b)	Chapters 2-3	the original meaning of the <i>imago Dei</i> in creation
(c)	Chapters 4-6	the meaning of the <i>imago Dei</i> as revealed in Christ
(d)	Chapters 7-9	the loss of the <i>imago Dei</i> in fallen humanity known through Christ's salvation
(e)	Chapters 10-12	the problem of natural theology– as an extended conclusion of (c)

At the very beginning, Torrance calls our attention to Calvin's twofold purpose in Christian anthropology: to discover our "original creation in the image of God" (in order to arouse our gratitude) and to examine our "present miserable condition" (in order to encourage our humility).<sup>39</sup> This twofold purpose sets the original state of creation above and ahead of the present and distinguishes Calvin's anthropology from humanistic anthropology which is based simply on immediate observations of the reality of human existence here and now.

#### **2.2.2.1 The Creation and Defacement of the *Imago Dei***

Regarding the *original truth* of creation, Torrance supports Calvin's emphasis on the noble distinctiveness of humankind within the order of creation. As he observes, "[the] order of creation points to the nobility of man."<sup>40</sup> This means that the world is created for humankind and humankind is created for God: "the whole order of creation must

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<sup>39</sup> *CDOM*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> *CDOM*, 25.

be regarded as designed to incite man to *respond* to the Father in love and gratitude, in worship and in adoration of His glory.”<sup>41</sup> But how can humankind alone respond to God in such a unique way? Torrance further observes here that “[i]n contrast to all other earthly creatures, man has been endowed with intelligence.”<sup>42</sup> The gift of intelligence is significant for humankind. It enables them to “have a special and familiar relation to God” in which God may address them through His Word and call them to a life of communion with Himself.<sup>43</sup> In Torrance’s eyes, the concrete meaning of humankind’s nobility remains rooted in such a relationship of intelligent communication. It is this that defines humanity as the particular *imago Dei* according to God’s creative purpose. As Torrance puts it, “man specially is said to reflect (as in a mirror) the glory of God, by an intelligible response to the Word.”<sup>44</sup>

But Torrance does not leave this idea standing by itself in the context of creation. As early as in the first chapter, he has made it clear that the actual knowledge of the truth of humanity is “from man’s actual position in the redemption of Christ.”<sup>45</sup> After expounding the distinctiveness of humankind in creation, he points out that “A more precise knowledge of the *imago dei* may be gained from the reparation of man’s corrupt nature in Christ, i.e., in regeneration through the Spirit.”<sup>46</sup> This then shifts our

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<sup>41</sup> *CDOM*, 23, italics added.

<sup>42</sup> *CDOM*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> *CDOM*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> *CDOM*, 35. Brunner’s understanding of Calvin is apparently acknowledged here by Torrance as fair.

<sup>45</sup> *CDOM*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> *CDOM*, 52.

attention from the context of creation to the context of salvation, from the original truth in the beginning to the present fact after the Fall.

Regarding the *present fact* of humanity after the Fall, Torrance's interpretation of Calvin concentrates on the concept of "total perversity" and expounds this concept also from the relational perspective. He explains that the total perversity of humans means the complete inversion or reversion of our relation to God. We were created to respond to God, but are now alienated from Him. The relation has been twisted round to its opposite direction and become "*against the order of nature* as God created it."<sup>47</sup> Torrance ascribes the reversion of direction to the mind in particular. As he explains, "Sin is properly of the mind".<sup>48</sup> The concept of total perversity also tells us about the persistent inclination of our mind. After the Fall it is only and continuously by means of our self-will that we can think over against God's will. While our mind retains "natural intelligence and judgment", these do not and cannot lead humankind "back into the positive relation with God".<sup>49</sup> It is due to this relational perversion that humankind has lost the *imago Dei* completely.

However, this is not the primary basis for Torrance to make his case. Before illustrating the full relational nature of total perversity, he first asserts that the necessity of understanding perversity as *total* perversity is in accord with the nature of Christ's salvation. He argues that human depravity "must be enunciated in total terms"

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<sup>47</sup> *CDOM*, 107.

<sup>48</sup> *CDOM*, 116.

<sup>49</sup> *CDOM*, 108.

because Christ's salvation is spoken of in total terms.<sup>50</sup> "the doctrine of depravity is properly a corollary of the doctrine of grace, an inference from the Gospel of a new creation."<sup>51</sup> This is because "To think of man as he is within the confines of pollution would lead to the contempt of man and to slander against the Creator."<sup>52</sup> In other words, to think of humankind simply as they are in themselves, as polluted, apart from what they are in Christ, is to think less of them than we ought and so to slander the Creator for their creation. Corrupted humanity must be thought of and known only in the light of Christ's salvation.

#### **2.2.2.2 The Exclusive Standpoint in Christ**

For Torrance, the light of Christ's salvation means that Christ must form the exclusive standpoint of interpretation, and this for Torrance is closely related to two key concepts, grace and the Word.

Torrance argues that the right exercise of reason "must be *within the confines of grace*".<sup>53</sup> We have mentioned that he emphasizes Calvin's teaching on the distinctive endowment of humanity with reason. Alongside this nonetheless, Torrance also points out that "What Calvin would have us note at the outset of a doctrine of man is, that the direction and motion of our knowing must correspond to the essential direction and motion of grace, for that is the ground of man's being."<sup>54</sup> The theme of

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<sup>50</sup> *CDOM*, 83.

<sup>51</sup> *CDOM*, 83.

<sup>52</sup> *CDOM*, 83.

<sup>53</sup> *CDOM*, 116, chapter 9, italics added.

<sup>54</sup> *CDOM*, 14.

grace is repeatedly reinforced by Torrance in his later chapters. For instance, he states, “To have been made in the image of God is an act of sheer kindness [by God].”<sup>55</sup> “Man’s image rests first of all and fundamentally in that objective act of grace in which God condescends as a loving Father to behold us as His workmanship, even though we have fallen and sin despite His grace.”<sup>56</sup> Human reflection of God is finally “an operation of grace beyond the natural capacity of the human mind.”<sup>57</sup> Or put it another way, the *imago Dei* “is really [found]...more therefore in the favour and grace of God than in the being of man.”<sup>58</sup>

Besides thinking within “the confines of grace”, Torrance also emphasizes that we must “keep our minds within the bounds of the Word.”<sup>59</sup> Early in the opening chapters, he observed that “[t]rue knowledge of man must be grounded in the acknowledgement of a revelation”, and “the knowledge involved is essentially reflexive of a Word of God.”<sup>60</sup> It is through the Word that God calls humankind into a special relationship, and it is “by the constant communication of the Word” that this special relationship is maintained.<sup>61</sup> The *imago Dei* therefore means to be “reflexive of

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<sup>55</sup> *CDOM*, 68, chapter 5.

<sup>56</sup> *CDOM*, 98, chapter 7.

<sup>57</sup> *CDOM*, 128, chapter 10.

<sup>58</sup> *CDOM*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> *CDOM*, 128.

<sup>60</sup> *CDOM*, 14, chapter 1.

<sup>61</sup> *CDOM*, 23, chapter 2.

the glory of God revealed through His Word.”<sup>62</sup> We can image God only by reflecting Him as known through His Word.

We have to further discern that these limits and boundaries ultimately point to one thing – the salvation of Christ. When Torrance emphasizes grace and the Word he is specifically pointing to the grace of God *in Jesus Christ* and the Word *made flesh*. As he explains, “the very heart of Calvin’s doctrine of man” is one which “we can formulate truly *only from the standpoint of the grace of God in Jesus Christ*”<sup>63</sup> and humanity “must be understood *exclusively from the Word made flesh*.”<sup>64</sup> This is true even for understanding the original *imago Dei* in humankind before the Fall. Torrance writes,

In the nature of the case, that [a proper doctrine of the *imago Dei* in man as created] is possible only from the standpoint of the man renewed in Jesus Christ. If man does not truly know himself until he knows God truly, and until in that knowing of God he becomes a true man, then it is only from the standpoint of renewed man face to face with God in Christ that we may understand the significance of the fact that man is made in the image of God.<sup>65</sup>

Here a Christocentric voice sounds, expressing Torrance’s sympathy with Barth’s methodology when interpreting Calvin. The paragraph is not unique in *CDOM* as we shall observe in a later section.

### **2.2.2.3 The Problem of the Remnant *Imago Dei***

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<sup>62</sup> *CDOM*, 31, chapter 2.

<sup>63</sup> *CDOM*, 18, italics added.

<sup>64</sup> *CDOM*, 36, italics added.

<sup>65</sup> *CDOM*, 35-36.



To a remarkable degree, Torrance's relational interpretation of the *imago Dei* and its defacement in Calvin's theology does accurately integrate and reflect Calvin's basic teaching on the *duplex cognitio*. But Torrance still has to deal with the thorny problem of "the remnant *imago Dei*" caused by Calvin's inconsistent arguments. He admits there is "a difficult problem" in Calvin's teaching on the total perversity of humanity because "in spite of taking this total view of man's corruption... Calvin says that there is still *a portion of the image of God* in fallen man."<sup>66</sup> As Torrance sees it, the problem comes from the distinction that Calvin made between the *spiritual gifts* and *natural gifts* in humanity.<sup>67</sup> He points out,

On the one hand, Calvin admits that the image has been wholly defaced from man, and that he is utterly dead in trespasses and sins. In this sense one cannot speak about a portion of the image remaining in fallen man. However, Calvin makes a distinction between the spiritual and the natural. At the fall, man was totally deprived of all spiritual gifts, ...[but] that does not mean that his natural gifts are polluted or destroyed in themselves, though it is through the natural gifts, such as the mind, that the spiritual image is reflected.<sup>68 69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *CDOM*, 88.

<sup>67</sup> It is worth clarifying that the distinction between the natural and supernatural is a terminology Calvin borrows from Thomistic theology. Although Calvin does use this terminology, it should not be regarded as a dominant concept in his theology. In this sense, Mary Potter Engel can reasonably comment, "Torrance's *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* is a bit misleading, therefore, since it relies so heavily on this natural/supernatural language." (*John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology*, Atlanta: Scholars, 1988, 29, footnote 48.)

<sup>68</sup> *CDOM*, 83.

<sup>69</sup> This problem of the distinction between *spiritual gifts* and *natural gifts* is mentioned by Torrance mainly in chapter 7, but is widely referred to in chapters 9, 10, 11 of *CDOM*. Since the focus of this research is on Torrance rather than Calvin, statements which Torrance takes from Calvin will not be presented here in length. To summarise Calvin's ideas briefly, the spiritual (or supernatural) gifts enable humankind to "understand the light of faith as well as righteousness, which would be sufficient to attain heavenly life and eternal bliss." But reason belongs to the natural gifts by which humankind is "differing from the brute beasts"; in the light of reason humankind "distinguishes between good and evil", yet the light "is choked with dense ignorance, so that it cannot come forth effectively." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.2.12, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, London: SCM, 1961, 270)

Torrance does not point out directly how Calvin is wrong to make such a distinction and to identify humanity's remaining natural gifts with the 'remnant image'. However he does describe how Calvin calls our attention to the need to understand the *imago Dei* in the *spiritual sense* and argues that "it is from our 'spiritual regeneration' that we see what the *imago dei* really is and in what it truly consists."<sup>70</sup> The regeneration of humanity in Christ shows that "the image of God is not any natural property of the soul, but is a spiritual reflection in holiness and righteousness."<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, total depravity indicates "a total corruption" of humanity "in a spiritual sense", in that humankind after the Fall is "totally deprived of all spiritual gifts" and "completely despoiled of the spiritual image."<sup>72</sup>

In fact, as early as in the second chapter on "Man's Place in Creation", Torrance has laid just such an emphasis the spiritual significance of human nature. He asserts that "there can be no naturalistic understanding of man"<sup>73</sup> even although "Man

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<sup>70</sup> *CDOM*, 52.

<sup>71</sup> *CDOM*, 52. But what must be clarified here is that though Torrance uses the phrases "spiritual regeneration" and "spiritual reflection", he does not mean regeneration merely of spirit or soul, but regeneration of the whole human being of both body and soul. We can see this more clearly in his own Christology and soteriology. For Calvin, this is also true. Calvin indicates that when we begin to bear the image of Christ, "this image consists in spiritual regeneration. But then it will be fully restored both in body and soul". (*Comm. on 1 Cor.* 15:49.) As Dowey notes, "Calvin links the process of regeneration to the resurrection of the body. The spiritual body of the resurrection is not a spiritual substance, different from animal body, but *is deservedly called spiritual*, because it will then *receive its life from the quickening or life-giving Spirit* rather than from eating and drinking! This is the way in which we are finally 'conformed into the image of Christ,' in the completing of our present spiritual regeneration." (Italics added. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994; first published 1952, 203-204.)

<sup>72</sup> *CDOM*, 83.

<sup>73</sup> *CDOM*, 24.

is no sense a supernatural being”.<sup>74</sup> Since human beings are made *for God*, they “have a supernatural destiny”,<sup>75</sup> a calling from above not from below. That is to say, humanity must be understood in its *spiritual relation* to God – which is *supernatural*<sup>76</sup> – rather than in its natural relation to the world.

By questioning the distinction between natural gifts and spiritual gifts, Torrance makes a strong point of viewing human being *as a whole* in relation to God and this also calls our attention to the God-human relationship being *prior to* gifts within the human self. That is to say, humanity relates to God in the wholeness of its being and hence is better defined by its relational nature here rather than by any distinctive gifts given to it. This interpretation of Calvin is picked up and recognized by some Calvin scholars such as Mary Engel, for example,

[From a certain perspective,] the image is seen as the right relationship of the *whole self* to God. This integrity of being, in which the whole self is rightly ordered to God, may be called true piety and is, as Torrance points out, a supernatural gift. Identifying the image as the gratuitous gift of true piety, the right ordering of the whole self to God, however, does not, as Torrance concludes, entail the rejection of reason as the image of God.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, Torrance does make a distinction between the natural relation and the spiritual or supernatural relation, as we can see from his arguments above. He regards the former relation as being *to the world* and the latter relation as being *to God*. This implies that he views the created order as a *natural* one which does not and

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<sup>74</sup> *CDOM*. 23.

<sup>75</sup> *CDOM*, 26.

<sup>76</sup> In this sense, Torrance uses the two words *spiritual* and *supernatural* as synonyms.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 48-49.

cannot really say anything about the *supernatural* God-human relationship. For Torrance, the supernatural relationship between God and humankind is found in Christ alone. The two kinds of relation here correspond to the two stories of creation and salvation and by emphasizing the supernatural relation, Torrance has in fact placed the salvation story above the creation story for knowledge of humanity in relation to God.

#### **2.2.2.4 The *Imago Dei* Defined by the God-human Relationship**

It is clear that Torrance consistently emphasizes the God-human relationship as the determinant of the *imago Dei*. Humankind bears God's image by responding to God and loses the image in rebellion against God. Although rationality of mind gives humankind the capability to respond to God intelligently, this capacity in itself does not define the relation and hence does not define the *imago Dei*. What is key for Torrance in the *imago Dei* is the continuing relation with God, and therefore both what he accepts from Calvin in the creation context and what he questions about Calvin in the salvation context, he does so in terms of their relational understanding. That is to say, Torrance interprets the *imago Dei* as an *imago*-relation rather than an *imago*-gift. The definition of human nature comes from what is between God and humankind but not what is within the human being.

As Torrance interprets it, the *imago*-relation has several essential elements and characteristics which can be ordered in the following way.

(1) The *imago*-relation is a *dynamic reflection* demanding human beings' active obedience to God's Word and will.

Torrance points out that in Calvin's theology "The image of God is in no sense a static reflection of the being of God, but a dynamic reflection by way of active obedience to the Word and Will of God."<sup>78</sup> Such a dynamic reflection "indicates how much [Calvin] broke with the traditional habits of the Schoolmen who used to think of the relations between God and man in terms of a gradation of being, and so inevitably of the *imago dei* in terms of a static analogy of being."<sup>79</sup> As Torrance illustrates,

[T]he *imago dei* is seen to be the configuration formed in the person of man by the constant will of God to communicate Himself to man through the Word. Thus man's contemplation of God through which the image becomes impressed on him is not a "*dead contemplation*" but an *active* and continuous one in which man is transformed into the image of God from glory to glory. ... When we do it, it becomes a "*vital life*".<sup>80</sup>

(2) The *imago*-relation is a *continuous reflection* maintained by God's grace and fulfilled as human-destiny.

Torrance underlines the thought of Calvin that although humankind is created good in the *imago Dei*, "yet we cannot continue unless He has His hand continually stretched out over us."<sup>81</sup> Inasmuch as the continuing grace of God holds humankind in a continuous relation to Him, human reflection of God must indicate a "life-answer to God's grace."<sup>82</sup> This means that the *imago*-relation is a continuous one which cannot stop at the point of creation as though it were already fixed or complete. It further

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<sup>78</sup> *CDOM*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> *CDOM*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> *CDOM*, 65, italics added.

<sup>81</sup> Torrance quotes from Calvin's *Sermon on Job* 10:7 f. *CDOM*, 62.

<sup>82</sup> *CDOM*, 61.

implies that the *imago Dei* “must be understood teleologically and eschatologically...[as] man’s destiny in God’s gracious intention.”<sup>83</sup> This destiny is one which has been set since the creation of humankind. Torrance refers to statements from Calvin’s commentaries where Adam “is said to be like God who aspires to His likeness, however distant from it he may as yet be”<sup>84</sup> and “the image of God was only shadowed forth in him, till he should arrive at perfection”.<sup>85</sup> This characteristic of continuance echoes and enhances the dynamic characteristic of the *imago*-relation and Torrance comments, “There can be no doubt that Calvin lays the stress therefore on the dynamic character of the image of God which is maintained in man by continuous conformity to God, by continuous obedience to the claim of the divine will upon him.”<sup>86</sup>

(3) The *imago*-relation is a *spiritual reflection* enabled by God’s Spirit as a supernatural matter in human life.

Torrance states, “All being and motion and life [in humankind], wherever found, are due to the immediate action of the Spirit of God.”<sup>87</sup> Our response to God is hence enabled not by any natural means but “by the virtue of the Spirit through the Word.”<sup>88</sup> That is to say, the reflection of God in human life “must be regarded as *above the*

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<sup>83</sup> *CDOM*, 61.

<sup>84</sup> Torrance quotes from Calvin’s *Commentary on John* 1:7. *CDOM*, 65, footnote 4.

<sup>85</sup> Torrance quotes from Calvin’s *Commentary on Genesis*. 1:26. *CDOM*, 65.

<sup>86</sup> *CDOM*, 65.

<sup>87</sup> *CDOM*, 63.

<sup>88</sup> *CDOM*, 56.

*common order of nature* and as consisting in supernatural gifts.”<sup>89</sup> It is “not a matter of [human] natural being, but is above nature [a matter of the Spirit].”<sup>90</sup> Therefore the *imago*-relation “does not involve a supernatural heightening of our ordinary nature”<sup>91</sup> but indicates the supernatural involvement of human life in God’s action through the Spirit. In other words, as we aspire to be the *imago Dei*, we must live a life depending on the Spirit of God without seeking to arrogate anything of our own.

In short, Torrance emphasizes the *imago Dei* as a relation in which humankind reflects God continuously, actively, and spiritually. It is clear that his intention is to expound Calvin’s doctrine of humanity from a thoroughly relational and dynamic perspective where the essence of God’s image in humanity is neither a static property nor a static status but a *living, dynamic movement* which corresponds to and answers to God’s initiating action through the Spirit. As Torrance puts it, the *imago Dei* “is not a dead but a living image, not a mute expression of the divine glory, but a witness-bearing image evoked by the wonderful grace of God in calling man into communion with Himself, and having its own essential motion contrapuntal to the gracious and continual giving of the Father.”<sup>92</sup> This dynamic-relational interpretation of humanity in the *imago Dei* is the basis for Torrance’s rejection of “the remnant *imago Dei*” in fallen humankind. For once the essential movement of witness-bearing disappears, the image of God is certainly and totally lost.

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<sup>89</sup> *CDOM*, 69. At this point, Torrance thinks that Calvin agrees with the Roman Catholic view which also thinks “the image of God must be related to a supernatural gift”. See also 68.

<sup>90</sup> *CDOM*, 73, chapter 6.

<sup>91</sup> *CDOM*, 69.

<sup>92</sup> *CDOM*, 71.

This dynamic-relational perspective must be viewed as a specific strategy and method that Torrance adopts to solve the problem of interpreting Calvin. He explains: “There are times when Calvin appears to say that the *imago dei* is equivalent to man’s reason and understanding, but on examination that never turns out to be the case.”<sup>93</sup> “In gathering together Calvin’s thought...we must say that Calvin does not think of the *imago dei* in terms of being, that is, in terms of man’s being this or that in himself, but in terms of a spiritual relation to the gracious will of God.”<sup>94</sup> Actually, in the Preface to *CDOM*, Torrance had already announced his intention of making a contribution to the traditional exposition of Calvin. He states,

One of the calamities of traditional exposition and interpretation of Calvin’s theology has been, by means of arid logical forms, to make Calvin’s own distinctions too clean and too rigid. This has resulted in an over-simplification which has obscured the flexibility as well as the range and profundity of his thought....This is particularly true in regard to Calvin’s teaching about the *imago dei*....I have tried...to give some progression to this exposition.<sup>95</sup>

By highlighting the dynamic-relational perspective, Torrance has indeed made some difference and progression to the exposition of Calvin and a positive contribution to the interpretation of his anthropology. He has downplayed the static view which Calvin sometimes employed for examining human nature and which had coloured his thought. At the same time, the significance of the God-human relationship which Calvin had also stressed in his anthropology, Torrance has heightened in a more dynamic sense. In Torrance’s eyes, therefore, Calvin’s teaching about the *imago Dei*

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<sup>93</sup> *CDOM*, 69.

<sup>94</sup> *CDOM*, 79-80.

<sup>95</sup> *CDOM*, 7-8.



should be understood like this: “The image of God is no sense a static reflection of the being of God, but a dynamic reflection by way of active obedience to the Word and Will of God. It is man’s intelligent life-answer to God’s grace, and as such is a continuous relation of his mind and will in orientation toward God.”<sup>96</sup>

## **2.3 Critique – Torrance’s Viewing Calvin through the Lens of Barth**

In his interpretation of “Calvin’s doctrine of man”, Torrance rejects the idea of the remnant *imago Dei* and the validity of natural theology. As a response to the Brunner-Barth controversy, his conclusion obviously conforms to Barth’s. This calls our attention to another issue, namely, whether Torrance has viewed Calvin through the lens of Barth.

### **2.3.1 Christocentrism and God-one-sidedness**

Torrance was one of the key figures in the effort to introduce Barth into English language theology<sup>97</sup> and his use of Barth’s theology is no secret. In *CDOM*, he takes a standpoint similar to Barth’s when interpreting Calvin. He points out, “in Calvin’s view the key to the whole doctrine of man in creation and destiny is the idea of thankful response to the unbounded *grace of God*. Nor can we understand the doctrine of creation unless we too are evoked to a grateful adoration of the perfections of

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<sup>96</sup> *CDOM*, 61.

<sup>97</sup> Refer to Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999), 113f.

God.”<sup>98</sup> But Torrance does not assume a general understanding of the grace of God from God’s various works in the world. In a comprehensive examination of *CDOM*, we find that Torrance refers to the grace of God specifically as *the* grace of God in Jesus Christ. He asserts that “the grace of God in Christ” and “the Word made flesh” are the only standpoint, the exclusive point of reference from which to formulate an understanding of Calvin’s theology.<sup>99</sup> This resonates strongly with Barth’s understanding of Calvin:

We need to note above all else that for Calvin...Christ is from the first the key with which he unlocks the whole. *Christ is that unspoken original presupposition* in terms of which we see God a priori as the ground and goal, ...and in terms of which we see ourselves a priori...as sinners, and are *thus pointed to grace*.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore Calvin’s theology “moves from [and] also toward *a single point*.”<sup>101</sup> It is beyond doubt that Calvin habitually speaks of Jesus Christ as the goal of the scriptures. However, as scholars commonly recognize, the structure of Calvin’s theology is based on the *duplex cognitio* of creation and salvation rather than the single point of Christ. To assert that Jesus Christ alone is “the key to the whole doctrine of man” in Calvin’s theology, Torrance has indeed viewed Calvin through the lens of Barth. Or to put it more simply, he has read Barth’s Christocentrism into Calvin’s theology, as is confirmed by his general promotion of Barth’s epistemology for theology.

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<sup>98</sup> *CDOM*, 25.

<sup>99</sup> Refer to footnote 64 above.

<sup>100</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995; first published 1922), 164, italics added.

<sup>101</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995; first published 1922), 167, italics added.

In brief, Barth recognizes God's revelation only in Christ and expounds the content of theology only from God's side. For him, there is no knowledge of God apart from the revelation of the God incarnate in Christ, nor is it possible for us to know God except through the power of the Spirit. The "conditions of the possibility of Christian theology" thus depend one-sidedly on God.<sup>102</sup> But furthermore, to focus on Christ the incarnate God also means acknowledgement that contact with God in Him is still made only from the side of God. Any approach to God made purely from the side of humankind must be rejected. Consequently, it is necessary to rule out in total terms any independent attempt by humanity to reach God.<sup>103</sup> That is why Barth responded with such an absolute "No!" to Brunner.<sup>104</sup>

Torrance affirms Barth's epistemology with obvious sympathy and appreciation. He is convinced that this is the scientific method which frees theology from "the philosophical epistemology in abstraction" and makes theology "determined by the nature of the content and subject-matter [i.e. by God alone]".<sup>105</sup> In Torrance's eyes,

[The way of constructing theology solely on the cornerstone of Christ is] the epistemological implication of justification by grace alone, for it forces upon

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<sup>102</sup> Alasdair I. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (Guildford: Lutterworth, 1980), 82.

<sup>103</sup> In his later years, Barth was more positively concerned with humanity and spoke of "the humanity of God" manifested in Christ. Nevertheless, as Alasdair Heron commented, he continued to insist on the unilateral nature of the action of God as necessary because "[t]he real force and power of God's 'Yes!' can only be heard along with the 'No!' that is necessarily carried with it." (*A Century of Protestant Theology*, Guildford: Lutterworth, 1980, 80.)

<sup>104</sup> Barth's "Nein" (1934) was published as "No!" in English along with Brunner's "Nature and Grace" in *Natural Theology*, (London: Centenary, 1946)

<sup>105</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1962), 146.

us a relentless questioning of all our presuppositions, prejudgments and *a priori* authorities, philosophical or ecclesiastical, in such a way that in the last resort we are thrown back wholly upon the nature and activity of God himself for the justification or verification of our concepts and statements about him.<sup>106</sup>

He therefore highly commends the development Barth has made of Reformed theology as “a very powerful epistemological structure”.<sup>107</sup>

### **2.3.2 The Barthian Characteristics in *CDOM***

Aided by such epistemological convictions, Torrance understands and supports Barth’s rejection of natural theology.<sup>108</sup> They also become a lens for Torrance through which to view Calvin’s anthropology. Torrance then proceeds to sort out Calvin’s anthropology according to the more “powerful epistemological structure” of Barth’s theology and to smooth out Calvin’s inconsistent teachings on humanity under the light of Barth’s consistent emphasis on God in Christ. That is what we see in his book *CDOM*.

#### **2.3.2.1 The Re-ordered *Duplex Cognition***

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1962), 146-147.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1962), 144.

<sup>108</sup> He explains, “Certainly it is at that point [i.e. the epistemological implication of justification by grace alone] that Barth’s exclusion of natural theology is seen on the two-fold ground of theological content and scientific method. His attitude to natural theology is governed, then, not only by God’s intelligible self-revelation but by the rational structure of the knowledge to which it gives rise in our faithful understanding of it.” (*Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology*, 146-147.) This is clearly reflected in the last two chapters of *CDOM*.

In the very first chapter of *CDOM*, Torrance announces a re-ordered procedure to understand Calvin's anthropological discussions. He explains,

If in the order of his discussion in the *Institutes* he gives an account of man and sin before an account of our salvation, he does that only by taking his stand entirely within the gracious redemption of man in Christ, and makes the argument from grace regulative throughout. ... He does not try to place himself in understanding or judgment artificially at a point before the fall of man, but *views the whole doctrine of creation and the fall from man's actual position in the redemption of Christ*. Therefore, though he expounds the doctrine in the order of creation in original integrity, the miserable ruin of the fall, and the redemption of grace, yet he insists that inasmuch as man has fallen from his original, and has been redeemed in Christ, and so restored to God's original intention, we can only make headway in a doctrine of man by viewing the whole from the point of view of our restoration or renovation in Christ.<sup>109</sup>

In short, Torrance believes that despite Calvin's *duplex cognitio* perceiving humanity first in creation and then in salvation, the real order should be the other way round. This not only indicates the priority of the salvation context over the creation context but also the inclusion of the latter *within* the former. "That is a point", Torrance states, "which I shall be concerned to bring out again and again, though I shall follow Calvin's general order of exposition."<sup>110</sup>

With this in mind Torrance begins his interpretation of Calvin's anthropology from his affirmation of humankind's distinctiveness in the creation and then proceeds to his teaching on total perversity. But on the other hand he sets "the confines of grace" and "the bounds of the Word" around the self-knowledge expounded by Calvin in the context of creation. Given that the confines of grace and bounds of the Word

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<sup>109</sup> *CDOM*, 21, italics added.

<sup>110</sup> *CDOM*, 21.

mean Christ, Torrance has reshaped Calvin's dogmatic structure from the original *duplex cognitio* to Christocentrism. As for explaining how to accommodate those teachings from Calvin that are not in accordance with Christocentrism, Torrance says, "Calvin does...point out the value of thinking of ourselves apart from grace [in Christ]" and "does engage in moral denunciations of man apart from the context of grace [in Christ]", but this does "not stand up to his own investigations."<sup>111</sup>

This explanation is quite different from the common understanding of Calvin, and is questioned by some Calvin scholars. Charles Partee for instance states, "In Calvin these ways of knowing do not constitute a 'scientific' method from which a 'unified field theory' of knowing is possible."<sup>112</sup> Partee argues that instead of seeing them as having a genuine validity for Calvin, Torrance views Calvin's use of them as no more than "a didactic device" so that Calvin "can focus directly on anthropological themes...in some sense setting aside their theological context",<sup>113</sup> which reflects his willingness "to exclude the restoration in favor of analyzing creation and fall."<sup>114</sup> For Partee, Torrance is trying to squeeze disparate elements of Calvin under one roof.

#### **2.3.2.2 The Two-sided Relationship Actualized by One Action**

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<sup>111</sup> *CDOM*, 18, 19. Torrance made this critique immediately after asserting that "the very heart of Calvin's doctrine of man" is formulated "only from the standpoint of the grace of God in Jesus Christ" (p.18). For Torrance the word *grace* in Calvin indicates specifically "the grace of God in Jesus Christ".

<sup>112</sup> Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 300.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 88. Refer also to *CDOM* 18-19 where Torrance speaks of "the value [for Calvin] of thinking of ourselves apart from grace" and of how "Calvin constantly employs a didactic purpose in his theology..."

<sup>114</sup> Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 88.

In *CDOM*, Torrance represents the two-sided relationship between God and humankind as being actualized by God's unilateral action. He observes, "One of the difficulties in expounding the thought of Calvin here is that there are two important factors constitutive of the *imago dei*. One is the act of God's pure grace, and the other is the response of man to that act – and both are brought together in one in the doctrine of the *imago dei*."<sup>115</sup> The *imago*-relation involves indeed a two-sided dynamic, a movement from God to humankind and a movement from humankind to God. But in actuality, the two-sided dynamics subsist in "only one essential motion and rhythm"<sup>116</sup> which is to be found only in the action of God. This is because ever since the first man and woman, human beings have had their relational movement to God perverted and have always failed to maintain it from their side. The continuous dynamic interaction between God and humankind must therefore be entirely maintained on the ground of "an objective basis which is the act of God's pure grace".<sup>117</sup>

What then is this "one essential motion and rhythm" in Calvin's theology? Torrance refers to it as God's continuous beholding us as His children, for "from the point of view of his theology Calvin has nothing to do with second causes"<sup>118</sup> and always makes everything depend on the immediate action of God. The only ground for the *imago Dei* is "the will of God to regard man with a fatherly eye".<sup>119</sup> In other words,

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<sup>115</sup> *CDOM*, 68. Torrance's comment on the grace of God and the response of man being brought together in the *imago dei* is of interest here since Barth singles out the former and Brunner stresses the latter while they both appeal to Calvin.

<sup>116</sup> *CDOM*, 80.

<sup>117</sup> *CDOM*, 69.

<sup>118</sup> *CDOM*, 63.

<sup>119</sup> *CDOM*, 73.

in the *imago*-relation, God keeps regarding us as His children and seeing Himself in us as in a mirror, in order to show Himself as a Father toward us.<sup>120</sup> The *imago Dei* “has to do fundamentally with God’s beholding rather than with man’s.”<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Torrance argues that “in our natural state we do not know that God wishes to regard us with a fatherly eye, and therefore we cannot come to Him as He would have us. It is only a saving knowledge of God that can enable us to do that – and that we may have through His Word.”<sup>122</sup> Put simply, knowledge of the Father’s beholding us must rely on the knowledge of salvation in Christ.<sup>123</sup>

This emphasis on the single movement of God’s beholding of us which is known only through Christ and his salvation clearly echoes Barth’s acknowledgment of the absolute primacy of the action of God in Christ. Not surprisingly, such emphasis has also been subject to some critique from scholars who do not view Calvin’s theology as being in line with Barth’s. Mary Engel for example criticizes Torrance directly, “This narrow focus on God’s beholding and the neglect of what the image

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<sup>120</sup> *CDOM*, 74, Torrance cites several statements from Calvin’s *Sermon on Job*: “God looks upon Himself, so to speak, and beholds Himself in man as in a mirror.” (10:7) “He sends us into this world even to show Himself a Father toward us. For inasmuch as we are reasonable creatures and have the image of God implanted in our nature we have a record that He beholds us here as His children.” (5:20) Torrance’s point here clearly falls upon the part of God’s beholding rather than our having an implanted record.

<sup>121</sup> *CDOM*, 73.

<sup>122</sup> *CDOM*, 76.

<sup>123</sup> We have mentioned that Torrance does not assume an understanding of God’s Word in a general or abstract sense but specifically as the *Word made flesh*. Refer again to footnote 64 above. Therefore what he means by the only “saving knowledge...that we may have through His Word” has to be understood as the knowledge of salvation that has been communicated and fulfilled in Christ, the Word made flesh.



means *in and to* humankind reflect a limited reading of Calvin on this point”, and “I believe it is Torrance’s Barthian bias which has led him to this narrow conclusion.”<sup>124</sup>

### **2.3.2.3 The Omission of *Accommodation***

*Accommodation* is an important concept in Calvin’s theology. Speaking of revelation, Calvin emphasizes that God *accommodates Himself to our capacity* in order to make Himself known by us. It means that God lowers Himself like a father who humours his children as he tells them a profound story in language that they can understand. As Jon Balserak observes, “Calvin’s treatment of God’s accommodating places huge importance upon human capacity.”<sup>125</sup> In other words, God has chosen to reveal Himself in such a way that He intentionally and freely implicates human capacity and involves it in understanding Him. Revelation therefore itself seals the involvement of human capacity, as God Himself determines, and establishes the special bond between God and humankind. This is true of revelation regardless of whether it takes place before or after human sin in the Fall.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin’s Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 52.

<sup>125</sup> Jon Balserak, *Divinity Compromised: A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 32.

<sup>126</sup> The fact that Scripture is written in human languages is particularly recognized as a means by which God accommodates to human capacity after the Fall to reveal His work in history and His personal being in Christ. Dowey indicates that in Calvin’s theology, the “knowledge of God the Creator has two sources: creation itself, and Scripture. The first of these...corresponds to the accommodation of God to human finiteness, the second, to the accommodation to human sinfulness” (*The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 50). As for knowledge of God as Redeemer, it is evident that here Scripture corresponds even more to the accommodation of God to human sinfulness.

Torrance, however, gives no treatment to the important concept of accommodation in *CDOM*,<sup>127</sup> an omission that has not passed unnoticed. In his research on Calvin, Edward Dowey made a point of commenting on the omission in a footnote, “Torrance pays no attention to accommodation... which other students of Calvin have found important for understanding him.”<sup>128</sup> The omission is perhaps better viewed not as a “mistake” on the part of Torrance but as a natural “strategy” as he interprets Calvin’s doctrine of humanity. If so, the reason for this can be explained as follows: affirming that God makes Himself known to us by accommodating Himself to our capacity gives a place, however limited, to our capacity of understanding revelation. This detracts from the single focus on God’s grace and action and involves human rationality as a necessary element in the *imago Dei*. As such, both consequences would be unwelcome to Torrance. He may not dismiss the idea of accommodation itself, but he gives no place to such an interpretation of the implications of human capacity. Convinced by Barth, Torrance feels it necessary to exclude the role of any independent human capacity from the reception of revelation. This conviction also calls him to abandon the static interpretation of the *imago Dei* credited to the rational capacity. The omission of accommodation can be seen to give him more space to do so and to explain why he “pays no attention to accommodation”.

#### **2.3.2.4 The Negation of *Conscience***

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<sup>127</sup> Torrance mentions accommodation a couple of times in *CDOM*, for instance, on pages 14 and 134. But he does not offer any interpretation of this concept.

<sup>128</sup> Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994; first published 1952), 248, footnote 9.

As Torrance chooses to downplay such consideration of rationality and omits the concept of accommodation, he also downplays another important concept of Calvin, that of *conscience*.

In Calvin's theology, conscience has a rich significance which cannot be ignored for understanding human nature in the contexts of both creation and redemption. In brief, conscience is a constituent part of the rationality endowed to the human mind. It is the *internal* voice making known precepts of God<sup>129</sup> and is no less operative after the Fall.<sup>130</sup> Twice in the *Institutes*, Calvin defines *conscience* as a sense or awareness of divine judgment which raises an accusing voice from inside the human heart and urges on us the need of redemption.<sup>131</sup> He also declares that in spite of sin "this tiny little spark of light remained, that men recognized man's conscience to be higher than all human judgments."<sup>132</sup> Calvin thinks of conscience as God's own

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<sup>129</sup> As Edward Dowey indicates, "God reveals himself to man *internally by a direct perception* of which Calvin distinguishes two elements: the sense of divinity, and the conscience." (*The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994, first published 1952, 50, italics added.)

<sup>130</sup> As Dowey has well explained, "God's precepts, or what God 'wants' remain the same regardless of man's disobedience", and "in accommodating his revelation to man's condition [God] has made known these same eternal precepts in various forms. The original form, according to Calvin, is conscience." (*The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994, first published 1952, 61.)

<sup>131</sup> The two times are found in *Institutes*, 3.19.15 and 4.10.3. For Calvin, such a sense of divine judgment is a kind of knowledge of God that human beings apprehend internally. He explains, "When men grasp the conception of things with the mind and the understanding they are said 'to know,' from which the word 'knowledge' is derived. In like manner, when men have an awareness of divine judgment adjoined to them as a witness which does not let them hide their sins but arraigns them as guilty before the judgment seat – this awareness is called 'conscience.'" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.10.3, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, London: SCM, 1961, 1181) He does not mean, of course, that conscience itself is the knowledge of sin and redemption.

<sup>132</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.10.5 (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, London: SCM, 1961), 1183.

eternal precepts inwardly keeping humanity from being animal-like in their ignorance of His laws. It is precisely because of this that human beings have no way to excuse themselves from the guilt of sin whether past or present. Calvin also points to the role of conscience in establishing the conviction of God's promises in the human heart. As he comments, "Scripture shows that God's promises are not established unless they are grasped with the full *assurance of conscience*."<sup>133</sup>

Torrance addresses the concept of conscience only a little and then quite late in *CDOM*.<sup>134</sup> He agrees that Calvin indeed "links on what remains of the original creation of man in the image of God to a *spark of knowledge* or a *portion of light* or a *seed of religion* still lurking in the soul",<sup>135</sup> that for Calvin "we naturally possess some knowledge of God, [and] that some distinction between good and evil is engraven on our conscience".<sup>136</sup> However, instead of on Calvin's positive teaching on it, Torrance emphasizes the insignificance and negative function of such dim awareness of God. He cites references from Calvin on such knowledge to argue that "from the very start it is perverted, so that it is really nothing but the fountainhead of all his [man's] superstition and irreligion."<sup>137</sup> Torrance likewise stresses that human beings "are blinder than moles" as far as coming to God by natural knowledge is concerned so that what little light is left to them in their darkness only serves "to render them

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<sup>133</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.13.4 (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, London: SCM, 1961), 767, italics added.

<sup>134</sup> Torrance only mentions it briefly in chapter 7 on "total perversity" and chapter 11 on "natural theology".

<sup>135</sup> *CDOM*, 101.

<sup>136</sup> *CDOM*, 160, Torrance quotes from Calvin's *Commentary on John* 3:6, 1:5.

<sup>137</sup> *CDOM*, 101.

inexcusable through the conviction of their own conscience”.<sup>138</sup> By disallowing any real or actual illumination from conscience after the Fall, Torrance rejects any connection between conscience and the perception of God’s will.

Clearly Torrance has the same reason for downplaying Calvin’s teaching on conscience as for passing over the concept of accommodation. Acknowledging any positive function of conscience will bestow a certain credit to something *within* humanity, allowing some room for the static interpretation of the *imago Dei*, and Calvin does have an inward perspective when examining humanity as the *imago Dei*. As he affirms, the conscience “is nothing but an inward uprightness of heart.”<sup>139</sup> It is certainly a kind of “likeness” of God that He imprints in humanity.<sup>140</sup> In Torrance’s eyes, however, it implies the remnant *imago Dei* and hence runs counter to what he is convinced of by Barth, that total redemption by Christ effectively implies the total defacement of any real *imago Dei* according to a Christocentric ordering of doctrine. The acknowledgement of conscience threatens such a conviction and ordering of doctrine.<sup>141</sup> As a matter of strategy therefore rather than as a mistake, Torrance does not deny the existence of conscience but only discounts its positive function and in so doing eliminates the need to include conscience in defining humanity as the *imago Dei*.

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<sup>138</sup> *CDOM*, 157.

<sup>139</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.10.4 (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, London: SCM, 1961), 1182. A similar statement is also seen in *Institutes* 3.19.16, “Therefore, as works have regard to men, so conscience refers to God. A good conscience, then, is nothing but inward integrity of heart.” (849)

<sup>140</sup> For this reason, Dowey asserts that for Calvin the conscience “is a universal endowment, part of man as man, an element of the *imago Dei*.” (*The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994, first published 1952, 56.)

<sup>141</sup> That is why Torrance criticizes Calvin here in a mild tone, “The total terms required by the Gospel of a new creation [in Christ] provide Calvin with a problem.” (*CDOM*, 83.)

### 2.3.2.5 The Critique

Altogether, there are many traces of Barth's theology in Torrance's *CDOM*. While Torrance examines Calvin's teaching from a vast range of primary sources, he displays evidence of a clear Barthian inheritance throughout, from the implicit epistemology to the explicit conclusions. It is not too difficult to recognize that he hopes to find a unity between Barth and Calvin, in bringing Calvin's relational framework (defining humanity in terms of the God-human relationship) together with Barth's single focus theology (concentrating on God's revelation in the incarnate Christ). As he employs Barth's lens to analyse Calvin's anthropology, he cannot help being impelled to interpretations and conclusions that ultimately *transcend* the *two-sided* relational framework.<sup>142</sup> Here the duality in the relationship between God and humankind is understood as being fulfilled and transcended at a higher level, the unity of God and humankind in the one person of Jesus Christ.<sup>143</sup>

For Torrance, this transition to a 'higher' level is of critical importance and exists nowhere else but in the person of Christ. He points to Calvin's whole procedure in understanding the nature of humanity. Calvin begins first with creation apart from the Fall, "for it helps us to view the nature of man in *direct relation* to the grace of God in which human nature really consists and in which human nature possesses a

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<sup>142</sup> The word *transcend* is used intentionally in order to avoid the word *contradict*.

<sup>143</sup> This is important for Torrance who rejects the influence of dualism in ancient philosophy upon Christian theology.

*high dignity.*”<sup>144</sup> Torrance then argues that for Calvin the only way to discern the original dignity of man in the midst of sin is “by looking to the grace in which he is renewed [in Christ] where we see again the grace from which he is fallen”.<sup>145</sup> It is here that Torrance’s relational thinking about the *imago Dei* shifts from the *indirect* relation between God and humanity to the *direct* one inaugurated by and in Christ. It shifts from the dualistic relationship in which God and humanity are *distinguished in opposition by the divine/human gulf* (especially after the Fall) to the unitary relationship in which Christ represents the *union in one person* of God and humanity. Only through such a shift can Torrance hold together Calvin’s relational framework and Barth’s single focus.

Beyond all question, the step that Torrance takes in anthropology is an insightful one. To a large extent, it removes the conflict between Brunner’s interpretation of Calvin and Barth’s. While Torrance supported Barth in the controversy, he softened and counterbalanced somewhat Barth’s vehement opposition to Brunner. As already observed, he did not allow Calvin’s relational characteristics and dynamic definition of the *imago Dei* to be suppressed or diluted but promoted and developed them.

Nonetheless, Torrance achieved the development and integration at a cost. As we see in *CDOM*, he finally abandoned, if not denied, Calvin’s multiple perspectives for examining humanity and only selected one perspective, the dynamic relational. But

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<sup>144</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 84, italics added.

<sup>145</sup> *CDOM*, 84.

Calvin also defines the *imago Dei* in a static sense and does accord human nature a certain validity in its internal dimension of thought. His multiple perspectives allow him to affirm human rationality and conscience as well as total depravity. That is why his anthropology seems inconsistent. Torrance, however, appreciates and is more attracted to Barth's consistent focus and also wants to avoid Calvin's seeming inconsistency. He therefore mentions Calvin's inward and static examinations of humanity but discounts them from any definition of the *imago Dei*. He concluded, "In gathering together Calvin's thought...we must say that Calvin does not think of the *imago dei* in terms of being, that is, in terms of man's being this or that in himself, but in terms of a spiritual relation to the gracious will of God."<sup>146</sup> By making such a conclusion, Torrance resolved the tension and competition caused by the parallel use of the dynamic and static definitions. On the other hand, he sacrificed something of the richness of Calvin's anthropology in terms of the complexity of humanity.<sup>147</sup> This

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<sup>146</sup> *CDOM*, 79-80.

<sup>147</sup> John Leith points out that "Calvin was ready to sacrifice logical consistency in order to do justice to the complexity of Christian revelation and experience." ("Calvin's Theological Method and the Ambiguity in His Theology", *Reformation Studies: Essays in Honor of Roland H. Bainton*, ed. Franklin H. Littell, Richmond: John Knox, 1962, 108.) This is particularly the case in his doctrine of humanity. Many scholars acknowledge that the richness of Calvin's anthropology comes from his taking multiple sources and viewpoints to examine the complex reality of the human being and they believe that this explains the seeming inconsistency and ambiguity. For example, Richard Prins summarized "four sources" that caused "Calvin's inconsistencies, ambiguities, and contradictions", and indicated that "Calvin's inconsistencies reflect those of the Bible [i.e. the Scriptural revelation about humanity]." ("The Image of God in Adam and the Restoration of Man in Jesus Christ: A Study in Calvin", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25, 1972, 33, footnote 1.) Charles Partee noted, "In Calvin these ways of knowing do not constitute a 'scientific' method from which a 'unified field theory' of knowing is possible" and "Calvin's goal is not...logical consistency in knowing." (*The Theology of John Calvin*, London: Westminster John Knox, 2008, 300, 310.) Mary Potter Engel particularly illustrated Calvin's anthropology as a "perspectival" one, i.e. his interpretation of human nature has various perspectives which seem contradictory yet complementary. She pointed out that in a deeper unity they describe accurately a complex reality because "the human being is



brought about some criticism of his interpretation of Calvin as being one-sided and incomplete.<sup>148</sup>

Despite *CDOM* bearing a rather Barthian character, it is not a work that Torrance did as a spokesman for Barth,<sup>149</sup> otherwise he would not have emphasized the *imago*-relation as an *active* reflection of God in a humanity which God has not created to be idle.<sup>150</sup> This emphasis clearly resonates with Brunner's accent on human subjectivity and responsibility. We must recognize Torrance as an independently thinking theologian who has made his own interpretation of Calvin in response to the controversy between Brunner and Barth. In *CDOM*, he has not blindly agreed or disagreed with any of the three masters – neither to Barth nor to Brunner, nor even to Calvin. This book distinguishes Torrance from them and should best be considered as the start of an anthropology of his own which he distinctively enriched and developed in his later systematic writings.

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an essentially mysterious creature that must be described from conflicting viewpoints.” (*John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology*, Atlanta: Scholars, 1988, 193.)

<sup>148</sup> For example, Engel regards Torrance as one of the theologians who interpret the *imago Dei* exclusively through the restored image in Jesus Christ but neglect Calvin's teaching on the remnant image. She criticizes, “those studies which present Calvin's doctrine of the *imago dei* as little more than an extension of or derivation from his Christology are incomplete. Failing to attend to Calvin's positive use of the remnant theory, they offer one-sided impressions of this aspect of his doctrine of the *imago dei*.” (*John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology*, Atlanta: Scholars, 1988, 62-63.) In the next chapter, we will address the issue that Torrance makes anthropology an extension of or derivation from Christology.

<sup>149</sup> Barth himself would evidently not wholly agree with it as he openly critiques the “happy inconsistency” that he found in *CDOM*. Refer to footnote 25 above.

<sup>150</sup> Torrance observes, “God has not created men to be idle” and Calvin “taught the dignity of human labour as part of man's response to the active providence of the heavenly Father.” (*CDOM*, 64)

## Summary

From his first work on anthropology, Torrance has made it clear that he emphasizes a dynamic instead of a static understanding of humanity in which the *imago Dei* stands for a living relationship requiring humanity's continuous reflection of God. It is neither an internal property nor a lost or perverted capacity of human nature and is based on the unity of God and humanity in the person of Christ rather than on the duality of the relation between the two. Fallen humankind cannot claim any remnant of the *imago Dei* despite the fact that they retain the capacity for reason. The *imago Dei* exists only in Christ and is revealed by his salvation. The *imago*-relation ultimately relies wholly on the grace of God. "Therefore a man must continually go beyond himself" rather than search within his own being to become the *imago Dei*.<sup>151</sup>

In advocating such a dynamic knowledge of humanity, Torrance attempts to integrate Calvin's relational thinking and Barth's Christocentrism. Viewed from a superficial level, Torrance's anthropology represents his considered effort to explain Calvin's inconsistent arguments on humanity. Viewed from a deeper level, it manifests his intention to revise the traditional approach in the light of modern theological method.<sup>152</sup> At both levels and especially the latter, he is doing something quite original and valuable for Reformed anthropology. Nonetheless, as Torrance himself genuinely admits, "It is difficult to see how there can be any *ultimate*

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<sup>151</sup> *CDOM*, 81.

<sup>152</sup> Or as we might say, Torrance intends to reconstruct the old orthodoxy in the light of the new orthodoxy. For more on the concepts of the old orthodoxy and a theology more determined by Christology, see further, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1, 366-367. See also the content relating to footnotes 27-29 above.

*reconciliation* between Calvin's doctrine of total perversity and his doctrine of a remnant of the *imago dei*, although the very fact that he can give them both in the same breath seems to indicate that he had no difficulty in reconciling them."<sup>153</sup> This would mean that some elements from the traditional picture which is untroubled by its own inconsistent focus may not be harmonious with a new picture which is concerned with scientific consistency. It would also mean that, for the sake of consistency, Torrance has to either leave such elements outside of the picture altogether or at least only on the margins.

*CDOM* is only the start of Torrance's exploration of anthropology, but it is in this book that the dynamic, relational and unitary characteristics of his anthropology first shone out to be further developed in his numerous later works. Actually we may find these characteristics shining through the entire body of his theology and it is not nearly enough to grasp his insights into the anthropology of the *imago Dei* through examining *CDOM* alone. Hence the remainder of the thesis will endeavour to unfold his anthropological contribution from within the full scope of his dogmatic system, particularly in his Christology and soteriology, doctrine of the Trinity and doctrine of Creation.

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<sup>153</sup> *CDOM*, 93, italics added.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Torrance's Anthropology in Christology and Soteriology**

In Torrance's theology, the doctrine of Christ and his salvation does not only reveal who Christ is and what he has done for us; it also reveals what we are and who we are destined to be for Christology and soteriology form the real heart of Torrance's anthropology. This chapter will therefore focus on Torrance's interpretation of the *incarnation* and *atonement* to unfold his insights about the *person* and *work* of Christ. In terms of anthropology, it aims at unfolding knowledge of humanity as understood from its regeneration in the new God-human relationship in Christ. Without any intention of compromising the integrity and inseparability of Christ's person and work, this chapter will treat the person first and the work second purely for the sake of material organization.

#### **3.1 The Person of Christ – Humanity Is Embraced by God in the Hypostatic Union**

In Torrance's theology, all Christological and soteriological truth is grounded on the mystery of the incarnation. Regarding this mystery, heretical teaching denies either the full deity or the real humanity of Jesus. Torrance opposes both of these vigorously. He follows patristic theology in viewing the incarnation as God's becoming human

without ceasing to be God.<sup>1</sup> It is a historical event that took place in the person of Jesus Christ and Torrance's understanding of Christ is rooted in the Nicene concept of the *homoousion*<sup>2</sup> together with "the patristic doctrine of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia*".<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1.1 Incarnation – God Becomes a Man in History

For Torrance, the incarnation is not a metaphysical idea but a historical truth, that God entered into spatial-temporal existence and became a human being.<sup>4</sup> This astonishing act of God brings into being in history an inconceivable person, Jesus Christ who is *God made flesh*. This is "the supreme truth that was secured for the church at the Council of Nicaea in the doctrine of the *homoousion*".<sup>5</sup>

*Homoousion*, as employed by the Nicene Creed, is used to emphasize the identity of substance between Jesus Christ and God, that Jesus Christ is of one being

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Homoousion* means that Jesus is of the same divine substance as God the Father.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 67. The doctrine of the *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* asserts that Jesus' human nature exists only in union with God (i.e. in the personal being of the incarnate God) and Jesus exists as a real human being (i.e. of the same substance of our humanity). Torrance affirms this doctrine as "a very careful way of stating that we cannot think of the hypostatic union statically, but must think of it on the one hand, in terms of the great divine act of grace in the incarnation, and on the other hand, in terms of the dynamic personal union carried through the whole life of Jesus Christ." (See the same book, 84.) We will give it more detailed discussion later.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Torrance clarifies that "The relation between the actuality of the incarnate Son in space and time and the God from whom He came cannot be spatialized" while "His actual presence in space and time and His personal interaction with our physical existence" must be asserted. See *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 18.

with God the Father and must be acknowledged as true God. Torrance states, “the *homoousion* of the Son [Jesus Christ] with the Father expressed the conviction that what He was towards us in His incarnate activity He was inherently, and therefore antecedently and eternally.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the full reality of God as He is in eternity is just as it is found in Jesus Christ. In affirmation of the point, Torrance refers to his teacher H. R. Mackintosh’s assertion in his lectures, “When I look into the face of Jesus Christ and see the face of God, I know that I have not seen that face elsewhere and could not see it elsewhere, for he and the Father are one.”<sup>7</sup> Torrance himself would often say “There is no God behind the back of Jesus.” What does this statement mean for the doctrine of humanity? Torrance in *Incarnation* explains it from three aspects. Firstly, it guarantees that the forgiveness of sin we gain in Christ is valid. Forgiveness would not be true forgiveness unless it is from God Himself, for “only God against whom we sin can forgive sin”<sup>8</sup>. Secondly, it guarantees that the revelation we receive from Christ is real. Revelation has to be brought to us from God Himself and “grounded on the reality of God’s presence in it”<sup>9</sup>. Thirdly, it guarantees that the faith we have in Christ is rational. If it is not God Himself who suffers and bears the sin of the world, the cross would become a “terrible monstrosity”, because “how could we believe in a God who allows the best man that ever lived to be hounded to death on the

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, ‘Hugh Ross Mackintosh Theologian of the Cross, An Appreciation,’ in H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Christ* (ed. T. F. Torrance, first published in 1912 by the Student Christian Movement, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 187.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 188.

cross”?<sup>10</sup> The second issue, the reality of revelation, is the one most worthy of our attention at this point. As already seen in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Torrance declares that “for man, knowing (God) and being (man) are bound up together” because “Man’s true knowledge of himself is reflexive of his knowledge of God.”<sup>11</sup> In Torrance’s eyes, the incarnation tells us that “the eternal reality of God has actually intersected with our creaturely reality, overlapping with it in Jesus Christ in a definite span of space-time, and thus constituting Him the one place where man on earth and in history may really know the Father”.<sup>12</sup> It is the revelation of God in Christ, therefore, which alone makes our knowing God possible and hence secures our genuine human being. If we deny the true and full deity of Christ we would have no means or place of knowing God and hence no basis for speaking about humanity. This is the reason why the *homoousion*, the identity in being of Jesus and God, must be emphasized.

Nevertheless, for Torrance the meaning of *homoousion* can also describe Christ’s consubstantiality with humankind. As he points out, “Christ is of one and same being as God, as well as of one and the same being as ourselves.”<sup>13</sup> To affirm Christ’s true humanity is of the same importance here as affirming his deity, for divine

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 189-190.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 13, 23. As indicated in the previous chapter, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* is Torrance’s first published book on anthropology and the main one among his few works specifically on anthropology. Several key themes about humanity are presented and interpreted in this book. Though he rarely points back to this book later when talking about humanity in his numerous books on other doctrines, he never changes his basic conviction and principles.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 76.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (the Didsbury Lectures 1983, revised ed. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 124.

revelation is only accessible to human beings when it is in creaturely temporal form. “Were Christ not man, God’s revelation would not actually be revelation to man.”<sup>14</sup> Torrance emphasizes the true and full measure of humanity in Christ more deliberately and explicitly than other theologians. He stresses that Jesus’ humanity is neither neutral nor divinised but completely identical to ours in both body and soul, flesh and mind. As a real human being, Jesus Christ shares our spatial and temporal limits, undergoes all our finite creaturely struggles, and bears all our frailty and infirmity under judgment and death like us. To help unfold revelation at a deeper level from the perspective of Christ’s humanity, Torrance refers to the statement from Gregory of Nazianzen – “the unassumed is the unredeemed.”<sup>15</sup> He perceives in this statement a profound and deeper truth about the atonement that it cannot be understood simply as a forensic pardon of sin but has to be thought of as a real regeneration of humanity.<sup>16</sup>

### **3.1.2 Hypostatic Union – Deity Embraces Humanity in the Personal Union in Christ**

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 188. This idea reflects somewhat Calvin’s concept of “accommodation”, but Torrance does not elaborate on the basic point here that revelation must be accessible in human language and thought for “revelation would not actually be revelation to us unless it were in our human language and thought”, *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 62. Torrance uses this famous statement of Gregory of Nazianzen several times in the book.

<sup>16</sup> This level is “more profound” because of the unexplained logic behind the famous statement linking *assumption* and *redemption*. The logic is that our sin is such that Christ has to assume all that we are and make it his own in order to heal it. Unlike a doctor who does not have to assume cancer into himself or herself to save the cancer patient, Christ assumed our sinful body, mind and soul in the incarnation in order to heal them in his own humanity. Whatever he did not assume would not have been redeemed and hence the statement. Torrance appeals to Gregory’s statement to unfold its *vicarious* perspective and his whole teaching on Christ’s vicarious humanity is a fine explanation of it. We will observe and discuss it in both this and next sections.



The concept of “*hypostatic union*” lies alongside that of the *homousion* as a critical one in Christology. Torrance finds in it essential clues to understanding the incarnation of God in Christ as well as his atonement for humanity. The hypostatic union describes the unique integrity of Christ’s being, that his deity and humanity are united in the one person of Jesus. Torrance argues that Jesus Christ must be understood “conjunctively as God-man in his one indivisible whole Person.”<sup>17</sup> Although he has two natures, he is but a single personal subject. His person is so integrated that it cannot be divided into a divine part and a human part. We must perceive who Christ is only as and from this one concrete and united person rather than as two abstract and separate natures.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that we can pay any less attention to the difference between the two natures or regard them as being fully ‘equal’ in every way in Christ’s person. Torrance here emphasizes the patristic doctrine of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia*. The two Greek words literally mean “not-person” and “in-person”. The former indicates that Christ’s humanity has “no independent centre of personal being”; the latter indicates that his humanity has “real personal being in the person” of Christ.<sup>18</sup> Torrance explains that on the one hand, there “would have been no Jesus apart from the incarnation so that the existence of Jesus even as man is an existence only in the Word become flesh, but in that the Word became flesh, there now exists [on the other hand] a man Jesus who is true man and exists as historical human beings

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<sup>17</sup> Kye Won Lee, *Living In Union With Christ: the Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Oxford/New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2003), 101.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 229-230. Refer also to footnote 78.

exist”<sup>19</sup> Together the two concepts tell of the full reality of Christ’s existence in which the reality of his humanity is dependent on his deity.

The hypostatic union has two significant dimensions in Torrance’s Christology. One is that the acts wrought by Christ in his human nature may also be predicated of Christ in his divine nature under his appellation as God, and vice versa. This is usually summarized in Reformed theology as the *communicatio operationum* (the communication of acts).<sup>20</sup> Torrance explains that as “there is but one Christ, we are forced to acknowledge that the divine acts in the human nature of Christ, and the human acts in Christ, are *both acts of one and the same person*”.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, the concept of the hypostatic union reveals an unprecedented relation between God and humankind: God and humanity are united in the person of Christ. This inconceivable relation is crucial for Torrance. It introduces a brand new conceptual insight into the God-human relationship, that God embraces humanity into personal union with Himself in Christ and it is from within this new relational framework that Torrance unfolds the whole divine revelation in Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 67.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 226.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 190. The communication of acts further implies that what has taken place in the historical man Jesus is what has taken place in God, and what God has intended to do is what the historical man Jesus has done, cf. *loc.cit.* 191. Torrance deals with the technical discussion of *communicatio operationum* in *Incarnation* (226) and with its meaning mainly in his soteriology, i.e. the atoning work of Christ, which we will observe later.

Accordingly and in terms of the new framework, Torrance points out three important things about the incarnation. First of all, the incarnation is a *dynamic act* of God. He stresses that Jesus Christ “has his existence *only in this divine act of condescension* in which God *gathers* man into coexistence with himself”, so that the incarnation “refers in one sense to [the] unique *event* when the Word *entered* time and joined human existence”.<sup>22</sup> It is fundamentally “an invasion of God” signifying an active movement from God to the world.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the *being* of Christ is recognized as itself an *act*, and the incarnation as an *event*. The unity of God and man in Christ should be properly understood not in terms of a static status of being but in terms of a dynamic action initiated by God alone, God’s *entering* history and *embracing* humanity into Himself.

Second, this embracing action is a divine act *once for all*. Torrance argues that as a historical event the incarnation is “a *completed event*” which “has taken place once and for all in the union of God and man in Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup> It indicates an eternal act of God that “does not simply fall within the limits and corruption and decay of mere historical happening” but “*remains eternally real* and alive happening”.<sup>25</sup> In this

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 67 (italics added). He clarifies that “the conjunction of ‘came down’ with ‘for us men and for our salvation’ is to be understood as an act of pure condescension on His part and not as an indication of finite imperfection in Him.” See *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 67.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 67.

sense, the historical is not simply the past but is alive and on-going. We must regard God's embracing action as being valid for the whole of history. So also we must perceive that the hypostatic union in Christ has a continuously acting effect on all human beings.<sup>26</sup>

Third, this uniting action reveals God's *new interaction* with humanity as being one characterized by *incorporation* and *substitution*. Torrance emphasizes that becoming flesh in the incarnation is such an invasion of the Creator God into the creaturely world that this is even new to God Himself.<sup>27</sup> And therefore "after the incarnation He is at work within space and time in a way that He never was before."<sup>28</sup> In order to save humankind God accomplishes the atonement not as a naked divine act wrought in the "upper room" but as a real human act accomplished by a real person in spatial-temporal existence. Through this one person, God incorporates Himself into our reality, becoming what we are and in exchange so putting Himself into our place that the atonement is executed *in* us and *for* us. Incorporation therefore is

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<sup>26</sup> This point should not be misinterpreted in eternal ontological terms for it does not indicate that God is eternally incarnate. The meaning of "once for all" refers to the on-going effect of the *act* rather than the status of *being*. Please refer here to the next point also.

<sup>27</sup> Torrance indicates, "God was not eternally incarnate, for the incarnation is something new even for God." ('The Atonement, the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, p.232.)

<sup>28</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 53.

substitution.<sup>29</sup> Together they proclaim atonement to be an “act of God *done into our humanity, wrought out in our place, and as our act.*”<sup>30</sup>

### **3.1.3 Vicarious Humanity (I) – Jesus as the Vicarious Human Being in Union with God**

Torrance’s interpretation of the incarnation and the hypostatic union brings to the fore a crucial concept in his theology, that of the *vicarious humanity* of Christ. Put briefly, the phrase means that Jesus Christ exists as a man *on behalf of all humankind*.<sup>31</sup> He so represents us ontologically in his humanity that what he is and does applies to us in a real sense. For Torrance, the vicarious humanity of Christ provides the key to opening up real knowledge of humankind, a knowledge which may be learned both from Christ’s being and from his doing. Although they cannot really be separated, we will focus on Christ’s being in this section on Christ’s vicarious humanity, and leave the second part on his doing or work till the next section.

With regard to the knowledge about us perceived from Christ’s *being*, Torrance points us to looking at the mystery of the incarnation from the human side. Here we see that while explicitly the incarnation means God’s becoming flesh, implicitly it means human life being taken into God. The hypostatic union reveals the astonishing status of humanity in Christ, that his humanity exists in such union with

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<sup>29</sup> Obviously, the teachings of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* and of the *communicatio operationum* all help to also give some explanation and elaboration of this incorporation and substitution.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol.1 (London: Lutterworth, 1959), 244.

<sup>31</sup> Torrance often emphasizes the notion of “one for all”. More discussion will be seen in the next section.

his divinity that they constitute one person. This united-into-one relationship is the “direct relationship” that Torrance emphasizes in *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Christ vicariously achieved such a union of humanity with God in his person not only marks the unique nature of his person but also reveals the secret to the nature of all humanity in their relation to God. In order to properly understand this important point, we need a deeper explanation of its content from three perspectives.

### 3.1.3.1 The Ontological Content

This personal union of humanity in God is an *ontological union*. It indicates an existential embracement of humanity but not a substantial transformation of them in their nature. Here the word “ontological” does not mean “in nature” or “in substance” but means “in existence” or “in reality”. That is what the term *enhypostasia* implies, that the humanity of Jesus Christ really and truly exists in his person; his human nature is neither swallowed up by deity, nor deified itself, nor transformed into a third type of nature. The ontological union is not an absorption of humanity but in Christ its complete fulfilment.

This ontological union has itself heralded and prefigured the reconciliation of God and humankind.<sup>33</sup> That is to say, when God enters into human existence and embraces humanity to become a personal human being, this is reconciliation actually being initiated. The incarnation in itself is essentially an act of reconciliation. The

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<sup>32</sup> Refer to the previous chapter, footnote 144.

<sup>33</sup> In Torrance’s mind, the essence of atonement is *reconciliation* of God to humanity as well as of humanity to God. This topic is essential for Torrance’s soteriology. The next section will give detailed observation on it.

hypostatic union implicitly demonstrates God's reconciling action even before any other saving works. Since this movement and action takes place in the very *being* of Christ who is the *man for all*, it has ontological significance rather than simply functional significance for us.

### **3.1.3.2 The Relational Content**

This ontological union is a *relational union* but not a material combination of natures. As God-man, Christ's vicarious humanity has such a close relationship with his divine nature that, without any material confusion between the two or change of either nature into the other, the two natures relate to each other so inseparably that they co-mark the one personal being. Together they constitute the *oneness* of Christ's personhood and the integrity of his whole life and action.

Nevertheless, the relational union does not indicate relational equality but is a union conditioned by *anhypostasia*. Although God and human become one in Christ, their unity possesses an internal order in which the latter is wholly dependent on the former. That is to say, the two natures in the united relation are not completely parallel or equal to each other, but are so ordered that the divine initiates while the human fully depends on it and is in that sense 'subordinate' to the divine. In other words, the hypostatic union in Christ comprises a *united but ordered* relationship of God and humanity such that whenever we think of this united relationship, we need to keep the proper order in mind.

### **3.1.3.3 The Dynamic Content**

The ontological and relational union is a *dynamic interaction* and not a static state. As an act of God, the incarnation signifies not only God's becoming a human but also God's now *acting as human*. That is to say, the incarnation means first the one-sided dynamic of God's entering the human sphere and embracing humanity; it then means the dynamics of the mutual interaction between divine being and human being in Christ. We must perceive that Christ's deity and humanity are both active. They interact so intimately that Christ can only be recognized as one acting subject. In this one acting subject, the divine nature and human nature communicate their actions to each other as outlined by the concept of *communicatio operationum*. From the moment that God became a man, therefore, the ontological union has pointed to the dynamic action and interaction of the two natures. Such interaction is self-evidently initiated by the self-communication of the divine nature and act to the human nature and act, and necessarily results in the mutual communication between them.

### **3.2 The Work of Christ – Humanity Is Renewed in Substance and Reconciled to God Eternally**

In the doctrine of salvation, the key theme is *atonement*. Many theologians use the word *atonement* as equivalent to an understanding of *redemption* which principally signifies Christ's paying the penalty of sin to reclaim us from the final and fatal judgment. But Torrance views its meaning in a far broader and deeper way. For him, the atonement is not only the redemption of humanity from sin and death but also the ontological renewal of humanity founded on a new God-human relationship in Christ,



the relationship of *hypostatic at-onement*<sup>34</sup>. The atonement reveals the ultimate truth about human destiny. In order to understand this important theme in Torrance's soteriology, we need first to look at his interpretation of the nature of sin and of the human plight from which human beings are saved.

### **3.2.1 Sin and the Human Plight – Relational Brokenness under the Dual Threat from Evil and God**

As observed in the previous chapter, Torrance interprets the “total perversity” of humanity from a relational perspective in which humankind is found to be sinful in their perverted relation to God as they rebel against and are alienated from Him.<sup>35</sup> Torrance argues that “It belongs to the nature of sin to divide, to create disorder, to disrupt, to destroy fellowship.”<sup>36</sup> The consequence of sin is the brokenness of the fellowship and the rupturing of the close relation of harmony between God and humankind. As a matter of relation, sin concerns and affects both parties in the relation. Torrance maintains that it is insufficient to think about the event of sin only from the human side but rather in terms of the relation between God and humanity. “Therefore we must think of sin as objectively real from the point of view of God as

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<sup>34</sup> Torrance points out, “It is the hypostatic union or hypostatic at-onement, therefore, which lies embedded in the very heart of atonement.” (*Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008, 196.)

<sup>35</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 247.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 38.

well as subjectively real from the point of view of man.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, sin must be viewed as a two-sided issue.

As Torrance explains, “Sin is revealed in its own act to be attack upon God, and to be something from which God turns away his face in judgment.”<sup>38</sup> The former concerns humankind’s rebellion against God and the latter indicates that God’s sentence on rebellion makes it guilt. Torrance particularly uses the concept of *guilt* to make it clear that sin “is judged and qualified as sin by God...precisely by the act of God’s resistance to it.”<sup>39</sup> As God judges the rebellion as *sin* and resists and rejects it, sin becomes *guilt*. This implies that “Sin is only possible in the presence of God.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is sin *and* guilt (that is, rebellion *and* judgement - not just the former) that separate humankind from God. It is this “dual nature of the conflict” which marks out the fundamentally relational nature and essence of sin.

The dual nature of the conflict further points to “the double change in attitude” that causes humankind and God to each become hostile to each other.<sup>41</sup> For

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 248.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 246. Here Torrance particularly appeals to Kierkegaard’s understanding of the God-forsakenness conveyed by the cry of Jesus Christ on the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Torrance indicates, “That is the midnight hour, as Kierkegaard said, when *we are all unmasked*.” Italics added.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 252.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 252.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 248.

humankind, the awful fact of sin is that “we resist God *and are resisted* by God.”<sup>42</sup> Torrance emphasizes that the “real ‘change’ in God’s mind and attitude toward man...constitutes the innermost gravity of sin”.<sup>43</sup> While the brokenness of the God-human fellowship is initiated by rebellious human beings, it is dreadfully finalized by God in wrath and sinful human beings have no way in themselves of getting close again to restore the relationship. God’s condemnation seals the utter brokenness rather decisively.

The plight of humankind, as Torrance sees it therefore, is doomed by a two-sided brokenness. On the one hand, sinful humankind faces a “constitutive change” of existence because the very foothold of humanity, its relation to God, has been destroyed. Their corruption is “not incidental or accidental” but “is constitutive and now has to do with the very existence of human being as such.”<sup>44</sup> Human beings’ total depravity therefore refers primarily to a “contradiction to God at the basis of human existence.”<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, fallen human beings are powerless to save themselves from such a predicament. This is because they “cannot escape out of their self-will”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 112.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 248. Nonetheless, Torrance clarifies that the “real change” fundamentally “rests upon the fact that God does not change at all” because both God’s holiness and love are not sacrificed in the process of his dealing with fallen humanity. See pages 248-249 for more detailed arguments from Torrance on the issue.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 252.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 253.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 253.

when rebellion characterizes their very existence in relation to God. “The more they strive in their self-will to save themselves, the more they sin”.<sup>47</sup> In addition, their hopeless situation is also determined by God’s judgment. As God has judged sin as guilt, guilt now “belongs unalterably to the past” and “determines the existence of every human being in the present.”<sup>48</sup> On top of human beings’ radical alienation, God’s radical rejection seals their hopeless plight. Therefore sinners exist “under the threat of destruction not only from the inherent negation of evil but from the negation of it through the divine judgment.”<sup>49</sup> This double threat causes all the anxieties and disorders of our life.<sup>50</sup>

### **3.2.2 Atonement – Reconciliation between God and Humanity through Christ’s Mediation**

*Atonement* is the key word employed by Torrance to talk about the saving work of Christ. In line with his understanding of the human plight, he interprets atonement as *reconciliation* through the mediation of a Christ who works on both God’s side and our side to restore the unity of God and humanity. In Torrance’s soteriology the mediatory work of Christ is wonderfully illustrated by a series of twofold themes. Here we summarize four of them that help us to approach the implications of Christ’s reconciliation for anthropology.

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 253.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 254.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 243.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 254.

### 3.2.2.1 The Twofold Obedience of Christ

First of all, the heart of Christ's mediatory work is *obedience*. This has both *passive* and *active* elements and Torrance is highly appreciative here of Reformed teaching about the twofold obedience of Christ. He interprets Christ's passive obedience as "the submission of Jesus Christ to the judgment of the Father upon the sin", "his willing acceptance of the divine verdict" which he endured in his passion.<sup>51</sup> His active obedience is "the positive fulfillment of God's saving will in the whole life of Jesus in his sonship", his maintaining from the beginning to the end "a perfect filial relation to the Father in which he yielded to him a life of utter love and faithfulness, and in which he received and laid hold of the love of the Father."<sup>52</sup> His twofold obedience gives us the necessary further light with which to comprehend the two sides (divine and human) to Christ's humiliation and sacrifice. While his sacrificial death is a transcendent act of humiliation by God, it is *also* an earthly act of human humiliation. On the one hand, Jesus Christ as the Son of God lays aside his divine majesty and glory to endure death on the cross. On the other hand, he as man and "in the form of man" submits to the creaturely estate under the judgment of the law even to the point of death on the cross.<sup>53</sup> The transcendent act of humiliation on the part of God "has its counterpart even within his earthly and human existence as Jesus bent to shoulder the cross and

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 80-81.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 80.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 75.

died in humiliation upon it”<sup>54</sup> These two types of humiliation underlie and are the backdrop to the passive and the active content of Christ’s obedience, and it is this twofold obedience that fulfills God’s redemptive purpose.

### **3.2.2.2 The Twofold Faithfulness of Christ**

Secondly, Christ’s twofold obedience signifies and is lived out in the twofold *faithfulness* from both the divine and the human side. Torrance declares that Christ embodied at one and the same time the “faithfulness of the divine truth and love” and the “faithfulness of a [human] life wholly obedient to the Father.”<sup>55</sup> The former speaks of God’s “affirming and consummating love of union with men and women even in the fire of the divine wrath” and the latter of the “utter and absolute reliance” of humanity upon God.<sup>56</sup> From God’s side, Christ’s faithfulness reveals God’s steadfastness of love and grace even in judgment. From the human side, Christ’s faithfulness steadfastly carries out the life of obedience and confidence in the Father that enables him as the son of man to call upon God in trust.<sup>57</sup> Through his twofold faithfulness Christ reveals that the atonement is significant for both God and human

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 75.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 126.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 113, 114.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 113-114.

beings, for in it there rests “at once the glorifying of God and the salvation of mankind.”<sup>58</sup>

### **3.2.2.3 The Twofold Righteousness of Christ**

Thirdly and most significantly, the twofold obedience and faithfulness of Christ accomplish the twofold righteousness that Christ achieved for humanity, the negative righteousness of remission of sins and the positive righteousness of a perfect human life of obedience and love. Torrance argues that negative righteousness is accomplished by Christ’s death on the cross and positive righteousness is fulfilled by “*his obedient and loving life lived in perfect filial relation on earth to the heavenly Father.*”<sup>59</sup> As the divine sacrifice without blemish Christ paid the price of sin to fulfill the forensic and judicial element in righteousness. As the perfect man, he lived out the right relationship with God to fulfill the requirement of positive human righteousness. The former fulfilled God’s righteousness in judgment. The latter achieved righteousness in actual human flesh. Both aspects of Christ’s righteousness are necessary for the justification of humanity before God, for as Torrance emphasizes, justification “means not simply the non-imputation of our sins through the pardon of Christ, but positive *sharing in his human righteousness.*”<sup>60</sup>

### **3.2.2.4 The Twofold Reconciling Movement**

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 114.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 82.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 81, italics added.

Finally, reconciliation between God and humankind is actualized by Christ through a double movement rather than a single one. Torrance depicts it as a movement “of God’s faithful seeking and assuming of man back again into fellowship and of man’s faithful return in Christ to God and complete dependence upon him.”<sup>61</sup> Reconciliation is indeed like Jesus’ teaching in the parable of the prodigal son: the *returning* son is reunited with and fully restored by his *welcoming* father.<sup>62</sup> In his life and death Christ achieved both dimensions or sides of the reconciling act at one and the same time. His atonement is a unity of the divine act and the human act. Torrance concludes:

The significance of atonement lies not merely in that Jesus Christ as man offered a perfect sacrifice to God, nor does it lie merely in that God here descended into our bondage and destroyed the powers of darkness, sin, death, and the devil, but that here in atonement God has brought about an act at once from the side of God as God, and from the side of man as man: *an act of real and final union between God and man*. Atonement means that God’s action was translated into terms of human action, for only in so doing does it reach men and women and become relevant to them as saving act; but it remains God’s action, for only so does it touch and lay hold of them, and raise them up to salvation in reconciliation with God.<sup>63</sup>

It is on the ground of all these twofold actions and their meaning that Torrance affirms Christ as the *Mediator*. He declares that “As both God of God and Man of man Jesus Christ is the actual Mediator between God and man and man and God in all things, even in regard to space-time relations.”<sup>64</sup> “Atonement is real and actual only if and as

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 118-119.

<sup>62</sup> Torrance mentioned this parable in *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 79.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 195, italics added.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 52.



the mediator acts fully from the side of man as man, as well as from the side of God as God.”<sup>65</sup>

### **3.2.3 Vicarious Humanity (II) – Christ as the Vicarious Human Being Living out the Life of Perfect Obedience to God**

Although again Christ’s being and work cannot be neatly separated, the second part of Christ’s vicarious humanity, on his work, now emerges more from Torrance’s soteriology: Christ vicariously lives out in his human life the perfect obedience of humankind to God. Torrance emphasizes that “We are saved not only by the death of Christ which he suffered for our sakes but by his *vicarious life* which he lived for our sakes.”<sup>66</sup> That is to say, before Christ died his redemptive death, he first lived out a perfect human life in our place. His atoning work must include his *living for us*. With regard to the substance of Christ’s saving work, while it is the moment on the cross that shows the climax of his passive obedience, the whole course of his life as a man shows his perfect active obedience to God. The latter, as well as the former, constitutes a vital and necessary part of salvation for if the vicarious life of Christ is neglected, “then not only do the active and passive obedience of Christ fall apart but we are unable to understand justification in Christ as anything more than a merely external forensic non-imputation of sin.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 186.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 81, italics added.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 82.

For Torrance, justification must not be understood simply as the forgiveness of sin in terms of a judicial pronouncement but as having to deal with the problem of sin itself, of undoing the rebellion with which humankind sins against God. Otherwise humanity would not really be sanctified from sin. Torrance asserts that the sanctifying process takes place not elsewhere but *in Christ*, who was born, crucified, resurrected and ascended *on our behalf*. In his vicarious humanity, Christ “sanctified what he assumed [i.e. our fallen humanity] through his own self-consecration as incarnate Son to the Father, and in sanctifying it brought the divine judgment to bear directly upon our human nature both in the holy life he lived and in the holy death he died.”<sup>68</sup> His vicarious acts fulfilled both the sanctification of our humanity and the righteousness of God’s judgment. It is in this fulfilled sense that humanity is regenerated and we are renewed. It is the resurrection which signifies God’s complete approval of regenerated humanity and the ascension which points to the final destiny of humankind. And it is in both together that the significance of the statement, “the unassumed is the unredeemed”<sup>69</sup> is seen in the final redemption of the assumed.

It is apparent that the significance of Christ’s vicarious humanity is just as great in his *doing* as that in his *being*, and just as the incarnation provides a rich source of direct knowledge about humanity, so likewise does the atonement. In the following section therefore, we will examine it also in greater depth from the ontological, relational and dynamic perspectives.

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 50.

<sup>69</sup> See again *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 62 (cf. 201), the statement of Gregory of Nazianzen often mentioned by Torrance in his works.

### 3.2.3.1 The Ontological Content of the Atonement

First of all, the atonement is the *ontological rebirth* of humanity, an “internal” justification and sanctification of human nature which restores it in its innermost being to true righteousness and holiness. Here the word “ontological” does mean “by nature” or “in nature”. In Torrance’s view, the “most fundamental truth” of God’s salvation is “the coming of God to save us in the heart of our fallen and depraved humanity”.<sup>70</sup> That is, Christ assumed corrupt human nature in order to work out our sanctification from *within* it. While humanity had been corrupted by willful disobedience, Christ reversed that by his active obedience. Such obedience is not something that could be presupposed or taken for granted even in his humanity, but was a hard battle that Christ had to fight and learn throughout the whole course of his life. Christ “learned obedience by the things which he suffered; ...it had to be fought out with strong crying and tears and achieved in desperate anguish and weakness under the crushing load of the world’s sin and the divine judgment.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, Christ has the same mind and soul that we do and faced the same temptations and struggles just like us, but he nevertheless overcame all the temptations and struggles by his active response to God in obedience throughout his whole life. His doing so is not merely exemplary but vicarious and in this he took to himself and appropriated *our* fallen humanity *from within*. The effect is not external but internal, that is, ontological. Moreover, the ontological character of Christ’s appropriation of our fallen humanity is reinforced by the fact that Christ himself embodies the atonement. Torrance points out that Christ is

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 49.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology In Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 132.

not simply the agent mediating between God and humankind but that as the Mediator he “embodies what he mediates in himself.”<sup>72</sup> He is actually the “very matter and substance” of the mediation.<sup>73</sup> The oneness and identity of the Mediator and his Mediation secures the nature of his atoning work as ontological rather than instrumental. It is these two layers of the ontological meaning of Christ’s atonement that together help us to understand it as recorded in 2 Corinthians 5.21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (NRSV)

### 3.2.3.2 The Relational Content of the Atonement

Second, the atonement affirms the responsibility of humanity in the *relational reconciliation* between God and humankind. With regard to Christ’s life, the focus falls on his *obeying* God as a man. His action of obedience is simply the proper, active, human response to God and Torrance emphasizes that we must “think of the whole life and activity of Jesus from the cradle to the grave as constituting the vicarious human response” to God.<sup>74</sup> Christ embodied not only “our questions to God and God’s answers to us”, but also “God’s questions to us *and true answers from us to God*”.<sup>75</sup> That is to say, alongside the initiating movement from God’s side, atonement also contains a responding movement from the human side. Although humanity can in no

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 67. Torrance calls it the “identity between Mediation and Mediator”. See the same page.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation, essays towards Evangelical and Catholic unity in East and West* (London: G. Chapman, 1975), 94.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 90.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 122, italics added.

way save itself from its total depravity, the duty of humanity to actively respond to God must be affirmed as a constitutive element of atonement. Without this element the atonement would become God's one-sided forensic pardon of sin, but not that mutual reconciliation in the relationship of God and humanity which necessarily requires repentance and correction from the human side. To put it even more briefly, the responsibility of humanity does matter for reconciliation and salvation and this is what Christ reveals in his life.<sup>76</sup>

However, this two-sided and interactive relationship between God and humanity is not an abstract relation but acutely personal in Christ. In contrast to the normal dual logic of two parties in relation, the God-human relationship in Christ is hypostatic, unitary in one person. The two natures in the person of Christ are not separate from each other as two individual subjects, but are united as one acting subject. This rules out any over-emphasis on Christ's humanity as if he undertook his human responsibility as an individual in his own strength. What he did vicariously for and within humanity he always did in the personal union of his human with his divine nature. This means for us that "the relation which obtains in faith...is not just a logical relation, but a profounder relation of personal intercourse or communication or even incorporation with Christ".<sup>77</sup> If this acutely personal element is missing, faith would become illogical.

### **3.2.3.3 The Dynamic Content of the Atonement**

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<sup>76</sup> This confirms Brunner's position that human nature is marked by its *responsibility* to God. Refer to Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 42.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 138.

For Torrance, “all the ingredients and features of God’s atoning work are knit together in one *dynamic whole*.”<sup>78</sup> On one level, this means that Christ’s atoning work is a *continuous movement* that “takes place from Jesus’s birth throughout his life and ministry and comes to its apex in the atoning reconciliation in the cross and resurrection and ascension.”<sup>79</sup> During the whole time he lived as a man, Christ offered himself moment by moment as a sinless sacrifice before God to redeem our sin. The price for that redemption was “a continuous vicarious sacrifice” that Christ began to pay “from the very beginning of his incarnate existence”.<sup>80</sup> At a deeper level, Christ’s atoning work contains a double dynamic (described as *substitution* and *incorporation*) between his reality and our reality.<sup>81</sup> *Substitution* is the exchange of what Christ accomplished for what we failed to do. Christ has fulfilled human faithfulness in our stead and his faithfulness is substituted for our unfaithfulness. His faithfulness not only sets us an example but becomes ours. *Incorporation* is the mutual participation of Christ and us. On the one hand, every action that Christ did is an action of uniting himself with us. His death, for instance, is his participation in our death. Christ died, not only to pay the wages of sin for us, but to participate and share in our actual

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas. F. Torrance, ‘The Atonement, the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order’, in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 242, italics added.

<sup>79</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, “The Incarnate Saviour: T. F. Torrance on the Atonement”, *An Introduction to Torrance Theology* (ed. Gerrit Scott Dawson, London: T&T Clark, 2007), 36.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas. F. Torrance, ‘The Atonement, the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order’, in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 236, 232.

<sup>81</sup> Although Torrance does not use the two words frequently, scholars often take them to express the essence of Torrance’s soteriology. For instance, Kettler states, “The inner logic behind salvation through assumed and sanctified human nature, for Torrance, is the reality of substitution and incorporation.” (Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1991, 125)

human death and so come into utter solidarity with us. On the other hand, we are incorporated into Christ through faith. Due to the vicarious nature of Christ's humanity, we can find ourselves in Christ and participate in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. By this we are not only redeemed, healed and renewed but also exalted with him into eternity to share the life of God. The double dynamics of substitution and incorporation together secure the promised reality and fruit of Christ's atonement for humankind.

### **3.2.4 The Destiny of Humanity – Being Brought into Union with God in Christ**

In Torrance's theology, the vicarious humanity of Christ reveals our final destiny of being brought into union with God and sharing His life. As the *one for all*, Christ ascended to God the Father, not just himself, but for us too and on our behalf. Salvation finds its consummation far beyond the forgiveness of sin in the exaltation of humanity to God. While Christ's resurrection confirms our renewal and restoration, his ascension seals our ultimate destiny. The ascended Christ continues his work of uniting our humanity with God in his one person and presenting us vicariously before Him, so that "we are gathered up in him and included in his own self-presentation before the Father".<sup>82</sup> In other words, the ascension is not merely about the incarnate Son returning back to the Father but about the vicarious human being going up to God in eternity. Our very humanity is thus exalted with Christ into eternity and is united in fellowship with God forever.

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1976), 135.

In thinking about such a lofty destiny for humanity, we need to notice three things. First, Christ's atonement establishes an *intrinsic unity* with God that extends well beyond the restoration of any external harmony in the God-human relationship. It reinforces the atonement as a complete reconciliation in which "God and man are not simply brought near each other" but in Christ "God and man become one for all eternity."<sup>83</sup> Second, this unity signals not only the divine-human co-existence in Christ but also the *mutual participation* in which humanity can even share God's life and glory. In Torrance's words, reconciliation "means much more than the reconstituting of relations between man and God, though it certainly means that"; it "means that men and women are savingly reconciled to God by being taken up in and through Christ to share in the inner relations of God's own life and love."<sup>84</sup> Third, humanity now finds its life and being *in God* rather than in itself. As "we are enfolded within the infinite dimensions of the love of God",<sup>85</sup> humanity enjoys a completely new relationship with God. This relationship is only found in the divine Being and is nothing else but the communion within the Trinity. Reconciliation must therefore be understood as meaning nothing less than that God "draws [humanity] within the embrace of the eternal Communion of love which God is in himself."<sup>86</sup> This is the final dimension of Torrance's understanding of human salvation and makes the knowledge of humanity

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 104. This clearly echoes Torrance's emphasis on the incarnation as the oneness of deity and humanity within the indivisible person of Christ.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 74.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 75.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 66.



ontologically grounded on knowledge of the Trinity. We will focus on this theme in the next chapter.

### **3.3 Critique – Anthropology in Christology and Soteriology**

In Torrance's Christology and soteriology Christ reveals not only the saving God but also the saved humanity. We see the former in his identity as the incarnate God and the latter in his identity as the vicarious man. Christ thus discloses *immediate* knowledge of who we are and will be. Such disclosure concerns our existence *directly*. In this sense, knowledge of Christ is existential knowledge of humankind, but Torrance's idea differs from anthropocentric existentialism<sup>87</sup>. Without separating our existence from Christ's revelation, Torrance's anthropology is by nature not existence-centered but revelation-centered, i.e. Christ-centered. His Christocentrism sets him in opposition to those theologians who think in terms of anthropocentric existentialism. In order to see the Christocentric character of Torrance's thought more clearly, we will make some comparative observations on him and Rudolf Bultmann.

#### **3.3.1 In comparison with Bultmann**

As is well known, Bultmann is famous for his demythologizing and existentialist interpretation of the New Testament.<sup>88</sup> He objects to proclaiming the

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<sup>87</sup> By this we mean the general method which starts from, focuses on and concludes in human existence when interpreting Christ and his revelation.

<sup>88</sup> Demythology means stripping the "mythical" contents of salvation away from what is revealed in Jesus Christ and then interpreting it in terms of human existence. From the

“mythical” stories of Jesus, such as the incarnation and resurrection. He also has little interest in the historical Jesus with whom the mythical stories are associated. Focusing on our existence here and now, Bultmann argues that the historical Jesus is only meaningful to those first disciples who had personal interaction with him. Since that personal connection cannot be reproduced in our life, “who Jesus is” in history is not important for us. In particular, Bultmann points out that the “myth” of Jesus’ birth makes no sense to modern people who do not think mythically. Christian faith cannot be grounded on the confession of any mysterious identity of Christ.<sup>89</sup> Anthropologically speaking, Bultmann and Torrance are in stark contrast to each other when they interpret human plight, human relationship with God, and the realization of human salvation.

### 3.3.1.1 The Human Plight – What Is the Relational Problem?

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existentialist perspective Bultmann raises a “decisive question” for theology; “whether precisely this salvation event, which is presented in the New Testament as a mythical occurrence, or whether the person of Jesus, which is viewed in the New Testament as a mythical person, is nothing but mythology. Can there be a demythologizing interpretation that *discloses the truth of the kerygma* as kerygma for those who do not think mythologically?” In his eyes, mythologies “do not have their point in their objectifying representations” and do indeed need such demythologizing. (*New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert Ogden, London: SCM, 1985, 14 & 15)

<sup>89</sup> Walter Schmithals interprets it like this: “Jesus is acknowledged to be the Christ, the pre-existent, incarnate and risen Lord, because his cross has been experienced as saving event, and not vice versa.” (*An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, translated by John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968, 140) The mysterious identity of Christ is also depicted by the concept of the pre-existent Son, namely that He is the eternal Son existing before the incarnation. As Bultmann understands it, “The fact of Christ’s pre-existence, so understood, does not make faith in the crucified easier (as if the assertion of the cross’s salvation-significance would be credible, once it were recognized that it was precisely the pre-existent Son of God who died on the cross) but itself becomes a ‘scandalous’ and ‘foolish’ matter of faith at one with the ‘word of the cross.’” (*Theology of the New Testament*, vol.1, translated by Kendrick Grobel, London: SCM, 1952, 304)

A fundamental issue of anthropology is about the human plight. Christian anthropology not only needs to give it a correct explanation, but also aims at expounding its solution. Bultmann perceives the human plight as being that humankind has fallen *victim to this world*. In his eyes, this world is one “of transience and of death” and no longer God’s creation.<sup>90</sup> “God stands over against the world” as the “wholly other”, and human beings are victims of the world since they submit to its power.<sup>91</sup> As victim, humanity loses its radical openness for the future, i.e. the possibility of change and becoming. According to Bultmann, human existence means *an ability to become*. The situation is that, “the being of man is removed from his own control, it is risked continually in the concrete situations of life and goes through decisions in which man does not choose *something for himself*, but chooses *himself* as his *possibility*.”<sup>92</sup> Once submitted to the power of the world, human beings surrender themselves as the only possibility of change and becoming and cannot be open to the future any more. In this specific sense of openness and possibility, human beings “cut [themselves] off from encounter with God”<sup>93</sup> and their hearts become darkened, cut off from the light of God. Correspondingly, salvation means to save human victims out of the bondage of this world, so that they may once again “open [themselves]

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<sup>90</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (ed. Schubert Ogden, London: SCM, 1985), 16.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Schmithals, *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (trans. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968), 153.

<sup>92</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (trans. Louise Pettibone Smith, London: SCM, 1969), 149.

<sup>93</sup> Walter Schmithals, *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (trans. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968), 65.

freely to the future.”<sup>94</sup> It is apparent that Bultmann finds the primary problem of humankind to be their relationship with the world. The plight of humanity is caused by the comfortless relation of human enslavement to the world which results in human estrangement from God. As the third party, God is involved in this relation only indirectly and distantly. He is more of “the future” which humankind needs to reach rather than the present help to which humankind may appeal for rescue. In other words, God is the prospective goal, not the immediate solution.

Torrance sees the problem quite differently. In his eyes, the human plight is caused, determined and defined by human’s relationship with God rather than with the world. As observed in the previous section, he explains that fallen humankind is hopeless in the face of the dual threat from evil and from God. While we cannot escape from doing evil in rebelling against God, we pitifully find no way to escape from God’s judgment. The misery of human life comes from nothing but this broken and disastrous relation between God and humankind. This primary relational problem occurs first and leads to the other relational issues such as our twisted relationship with the world. Salvation must therefore first deal with the God-human relationship and the reconciliation of humankind back to God. It must also be *from* God who alone is able to remove the dual threat facing humanity and who has revealed and accomplished His salvation through incarnation. The incarnate God is thus the real and only solution.

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<sup>94</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (ed. Schubert Ogden, London: SCM, 1985), 18.

Obviously, Torrance would not agree with Bultmann in regarding humankind as the *victim* of the *corrupted creation*. The truth of humanity's plight is not that human beings are oppressed and enslaved by the world which somehow has become corrupted and is no longer the creation of God. On the contrary, it is human beings rebelling against and alienating themselves from God that corrupts God's creation and causes other problems. So Torrance would also disagree with Bultmann in regarding the misery of humankind merely as the loss of possibilities. That is to say, the authentic existence of humankind does not mean "an ability to be" (or "an ability to become") and "openness to the future" through bondage-free self-decision (choosing oneself as one's possibility). On the contrary, it means that one's condition of life should not be self-determined but should be determined by the God-human relationship in both present and future. The fundamental reason for our destruction resides in the judgment from God rather than in the transience and death found in this world. Without doubt, Torrance penetrates to the root of humanity's plight. His interpretation based on the God-human relation is deeper than Bultmann's interpretation based on the world-human relation.

### **3.3.1.2 The Human Relationship with God – What Is the Ontological Foundation?**

These different understandings of the human plight reflect different perceptions of the second issue, the human relationship with God. We may see these more clearly from considering Bultmann and Torrance's differing interpretation of the revelation of Christ.

Bultmann argues that “the Revelation is no worldly occurrence, but an *other-worldly* one.”<sup>95</sup> He calls Jesus Christ “the revealer”<sup>96</sup> and maintains that all the miraculous works of Jesus “are remarkable occurrences” which make the activity of the revealer “a disturbance of what is familiar to the world.”<sup>97</sup> In his eyes, the incarnation is not the self-revelation of God but a “paradoxical way” in which “the *claim* of revelation sounds loud and clear”.<sup>98</sup> It basically means God’s sending a revealer to perform the saving act and make the divine act audible and visible. This act takes place only on the cross. As for the miracle of God made flesh, it “is not visible or ascertainable like worldly events.”<sup>99</sup> So likewise is the miracle of resurrection. Therefore only the crucifixion can really define Jesus’ identity. The whole New Testament is about the *crucified one* who is *proclaimed as* the Christ and Lord.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, for Bultmann, revelation ultimately conveys only knowledge of the world and of the human self but not the knowledge of God. Although he occasionally admits

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<sup>95</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (trans. Kendrick Grobel, London: SCM, 1955), 44, italics added.

<sup>96</sup> For Bultmann, the one thing that believers recognize about Jesus is that Jesus is the revealer. He argues, for example, Jesus’ omniscience is “not understood to be his superhuman ability, but his knowledge which is transmitted to the believer: whoever has recognized him as the revealer by knowing that one thing knows everything”. (*Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Kendrick Grobel, London: SCM, 1955, 43)

<sup>97</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol.2 (trans. Kendrick Grobel, London: SCM, 1955), 44.

<sup>98</sup> Walter Schmithals, *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (trans. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968), 155.

<sup>99</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol.1 (trans. Reginald H. Fuller, London: S.P.C.K., 1953), 197.

<sup>100</sup> But as already mentioned, the identity of Christ depends not on who he is in himself, but on how he is experienced. See again Schmithals on Bultmann, “Jesus *is acknowledged to be* the Christ, the pre-existent, incarnate and risen Lord, because his cross has been experienced as saving event, and not vice versa.” (*An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968, 140, italics added.)

that God's reality and love become visible and tangible in Jesus, more often he argues that Jesus "has imparted no information about God at all, any more than he has brought instruction about the origin of the world or the fate of the self."<sup>101</sup> The divine revelation discloses nothing new but who we already are authentically.<sup>102</sup> As Bultmann focuses on "anthropocentric" revelation, he also asserts that revelation is authenticated not by God's incarnation, but by believers' recognition and acknowledgment in faith. Without the latter, all truth is still hidden rather than disclosed.<sup>103</sup>

We find that Bultmann's interpretation of Christ's revelation has little to do with the God-human relation directly, let alone with relational reconciliation. Indirectly, we can see that he views the relationship of humankind to God through a

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<sup>101</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol.2 (trans. Kendrick Grobel, London: SCM, 1955), 41. Bultmann clearly makes the latter statement dominant over the former one in his theology. He similarly emphasizes the latter in another book, for example in his statement, "What, then, has been revealed? Nothing at all, so far as the question about revelation asks for doctrines – doctrines, say, that no man could have discovered for himself – or for mysteries that become known once and for all as soon as they are communicated. On the other hand, however, *everything has been revealed, in so far as man's eyes are opened to his own existence and he is once again able to understand himself.*" (*Existence and Faith*, ed. Schubert Ogden, London: Fontana, 1962, 85) As for the divine reality in the person of Jesus, Bultmann's emphasis falls on the appearance of action, not the essence of being. As Schmithals notes, "what Jesus...*says and does* is the *word and act* of God; in that...God himself is revealed; anyone who encounters him [Jesus] encounters God." (*An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968, 155, italics added.)

<sup>102</sup> Bultmann argues that "the New Testament and philosophy agree that we can lead an authentic life only because we are already standing in it and it is already ours. ...Why? Precisely because it knows that we can only be and become what we already are". (*New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert Ogden, London: SCM, 1985, 26-27)

<sup>103</sup> See again, *Existence and Faith* (ed. by Schubert Ogden, London: Fontana, 1962), 85, where Bultmann says that nothing has been revealed as far as doctrines or mysteries are concerned but that after one comes into faith, "however, *everything* has been revealed, in so far as man's eyes are opened to his own existence and he is once again able to understand himself."

dualistic framework of *the world vis-a-vis a God* who stands over against this world as the “wholly other”. It is this dualistic presupposition which makes Bultmann regard revelation as also other-worldly. For him, the whole story is about God’s sending a revealer from the other world and our recognizing him in this world. And the relation we find is one of a dualistic confrontation not only between God and the world but between Christ’s revelation and our recognition of it. While God initiates sending and revealing from the divine side, we confront that and respond to it with acknowledgment or denial from the worldly side. Neither side can complete the revelation on their own. In this picture, Christ is defined only by his functional role and not by his ontological being. To God, he is the one sent by Him to perform judgement. To the world and humankind, he is the one crucified and proclaimed as Lord. As for whether he is of divine or human nature, it does not matter nor can it be verified. Actually it is impossible to identify him in terms of his nature for oddly enough he somehow straddles two sides which contradict each other in dualistic tension. There is reason to believe that this explains why Bultmann in his theology ignores the importance of both the miracle-doing Jesus and the historical Jesus.

Compared to Bultmann, Torrance depicts a totally different picture of Christ’s revelation. He also unfolds a new understanding of the God-human relationship which completely reverses the dualistic one and is in fact diametrically opposite to that of Bultmann. Torrance does assert the brokenness of the relationship between God and humankind after the Fall. But as mentioned already, he believes that the plight of humankind is due to nothing else but our alienation from God and God’s resistance to us which together separate humankind from God by an awful gulf. Nevertheless,



Torrance perceives that this broken relationship does not confine Christ but is what Christ works upon and inverts or reverses. Torrance especially calls our attention to the fact that the revelation of Christ not only conveys the message of God's saving us by reversing the broken relation but actually *is* the relational reversion. This points to the innermost core of his Christology and soteriology, that it is the personal being of Christ himself which is the ontological foundation for salvation in terms of restoring the God-human relationship. For Torrance, the incarnation sets the cornerstone for revelation, and the hypostatic union defines "the heart of Reconciliation and its full substance".<sup>104</sup> The incarnation literally means God's breaking into human existence and becoming a human being, Jesus the Nazarene. In Jesus, God did not merely live alongside people within history but even acted as man to recreate humanity from within. The hypostatic union demonstrates God's overcoming the gulf to establish in Christ a unitary relationship with humankind. It reverses any concept of a dualistic relationship so thoroughly that God and humanity even become one in the one person of Christ. This is what Torrance sees in the revelation of Christ and this is why he claims that the hypostatic union is "the immediate ground for all Christ's mediatorial and reconciling activity in our human existence."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 194. The "heart position" of the incarnation and hypostatic union in Torrance's theology is clearly noticed by scholars. For example, Kye Won Lee states, "Christ's incarnational union with us is central to Torrance's whole theology, so that his theology can be in a sense characterized as an incarnational theology." (*Living in Union with Christ: the Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance*, New York: Peter Lang, 2003, 121.)

<sup>105</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster, 1983), 75.

This revelation further implies that our relationship with God is found in our relationship with Christ. On the one hand, Christ himself is God. There is no other God behind Christ, so how we relate to Christ is identical to how we relate to God. Moreover, Christ is the one human for all. We find ourselves *in* him.<sup>106</sup> How he relates to God in his vicarious humanity determines how we relate to God. These two dimensions of deity and vicarious humanity doubly confirm the person of Christ as the ontological foundation of the God-human relationship. He is not just the revealer who is the instrument of revelation; he is himself the revelation who directly embodies the God-human reconciliation. This conviction shines through Torrance's Christology and soteriology in complete and striking distinction from Bultmann's anthropocentric account of revelation.

### **3.3.1.3 The Fulfillment of Human Salvation – What Is Its Dynamic Essence?**

The revelation of Christ brings about the salvation of humankind. In what sense does salvation become fulfilled? This question becomes another division between Bultmann and Torrance.

Bultmann's answer corresponds to his teachings about the identity of Christ, the God-world relationship and the substance of revelation. He regards salvation as fulfilled in terms of God fully revealing His judgment on the world. The cross visibly manifests God's condemnation of this world and thus makes human beings of the

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<sup>106</sup> It is fair to say that for Torrance the phrase "in Christ" primarily points to the secret of Christ's vicarious humanity *in which we truly find ourselves*. Only with this as the primary meaning, does it then point to ours *if we have faith in him*.

world see themselves clearly and ask no more questions.<sup>107</sup> The compelling act of God's judgment compels them to make a final decision, i.e. to surrender to God or to the world.<sup>108</sup> As long as one chooses to surrender to God, judgment becomes salvation, otherwise it becomes condemnation. It is in this sense that "Revelation has taken place once for all in the full historical appearance of a man, so that death and life for all are decided for ever in men's attitude to him."<sup>109</sup> To a certain degree, salvation is nothing other than the condemnation. If something has been accomplished in the perfect tense, it cannot be anything more than the judgment of God. The actual salvation of humanity waits for and depends on our response, and whether we are saved or not cannot be finalized until we have made a decision for ourselves. That is to say, the fulfillment of salvation contains the dynamics of God's judging and our personal decision.<sup>110</sup> While the former has been guaranteed by the crucifixion even in the past,

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<sup>107</sup> As Bultmann explains, "Man always asks questions because he does not understand himself; if he does understand himself, however, all questioning ceases. He is then transparent to himself; he has become 'light'. For if Jesus is the 'light' that enlightens every man, this does not mean that he gives them a capacity for knowledge (or strengthens such a capacity), by means of which the things of the world may be illumined, but rather that he gives them the light through which they may understand themselves." (*Existence and Faith*, ed. Schubert Ogden, London: Fontana, 1962), 86.

<sup>108</sup> As Walter Schmithals put it, "Among men who have fallen victim to the lies of the world, the truth of their own existence has become present [on the cross]. In this way judgment has dawned on the world and has made possible for men the act of decision against the world and for God. (*An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968, 152.)

<sup>109</sup> *Johannesevangelium*, p. 189. Quote from Walter Schmithals' *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (trans. John Bowden, London: SCM, 1968), 151.

<sup>110</sup> Bultmann mentioned that God has sent Jesus out of love. However, he appealed to 1 John 2.15 to allege, "The intent of this sending is...fulfilled in those who believe in Jesus..., while he who loves the world is not embraced by the love of God." (*Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, London: SCM, 1955, vol. 2, 35.) In others words, God's loving dynamics does not universally reach all human beings in the same way as the judging dynamics. From God's side, the universal category for salvation is "judgment" rather than "love". Therefore we do not count it in the dynamic essence.

the latter relies on us here and now for salvation can only be in the present. Therefore the fulfillment of salvation cannot be affirmed in a complete sense by Christ alone.

For Torrance, the fulfillment of salvation is one hundred percent guaranteed by Christ alone in his person and work. The incarnation and the hypostatic union disclose the fundamental content of the whole dynamics of salvation in Christ, God's *coming* to the world and *embracing* humanity in Himself, and humanity's *depending* on and *acting in unity* with God. The life of Christ further discloses God's *correcting* of humanity through Christ's active obedience. The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ then finally disclose God's *justifying*, *renewing* and *lifting up* of humanity. All these dynamics have been fulfilled in the past tense in Christ, who is not only the incarnate God but also the vicarious man. Therefore, whether from God's side or the human side, salvation has been accomplished already. If there is still something going on, it is the living and unifying dynamics of the risen Christ, who continues representing us before God and in whom we continue participating in God's life. In Torrance's theology, the fulfillment of salvation has clearly a richer dynamic content that extends far beyond the rival picture of judgement from God's side versus personal decision making from the human side. In Torrance the dynamic consists of the profound humiliation of God and the real transformation of humanity and its essence is the unifying movement which God executes through the incarnation. Without the incarnation, the inconceivable reality of the hypostatic union in Christ, salvation cannot even begin, let alone find its fulfillment.

The comparison between Bultmann and Torrance shows that what Bultmann demythologizes Torrance emphasizes, namely, the unique *person* of Christ. For Bultmann, the person of Christ has only an outward function as an instrument of revelation, and has nothing to do with the objective reality of either the revelation or of the salvation itself. For Torrance, Christ reveals God Himself, changes the God-human relationship and fulfills salvation all *in his own personal being*. The objective reality of God's revelation and of human salvation is internally secured in the person of Jesus. Therefore what for Bultmann is the "myth" of Christ is for Torrance just the "secret" of revelation and salvation. To understand revelation and salvation then means to recognize the secret.<sup>111</sup>

This helps us to see more clearly the Christocentrism in Torrance's Christology and soteriology. For Torrance, Christocentric epistemology pivots upon the *person* of Christ. Jesus Christ *per se* is the revelation and salvation of God. The validity of his work is determined by his unique personal identity as the God-man. His teaching, healing and sacrifice on the cross are salvific because he alone is *the* person who mediates. Anyone else (e.g. Peter who also taught, healed and died on a cross) cannot make the same works salvific. While Christ's person and work can in no way be separated from each other, his work depends on his person, but not the other way round.<sup>112</sup> Therefore the meaning of the incarnation deserves our complete and

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<sup>111</sup> We can fairly say, for Bultmann, the uttermost myth of Christ is his incarnation and resurrection. For Torrance, incarnation is the secret of revelation and resurrection is the climax of salvation. One may further refer to Paul Molnar, *Incarnation and Resurrection: toward a Contemporary Understanding* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> We may see a precise analogy here with the relation between Christ's deity and humanity. As the doctrine of *anhypostasia* and *enhyposstasia* depicts, Christ's humanity depends on his

undivided attention. Without the incarnation, everything else, the whole saving work of Jesus, would lose its foundation.

### **3.3.2 Torrance's Anthropological Contribution**

How does Torrance contribute to theological anthropology through his Christology and soteriology? Perhaps the best way to begin assessing it is to view Torrance in the broader picture of theological tradition. We need to keep in mind that Torrance's theology takes its stand on the Greek fathers' teaching, abides by Reformed theology and bears the influence of Barth's thought. But he does not merely repeat them in putting together a learned, recondite combination of them. His Christology and soteriology, though not revolutionary, are reconstructive to a highly significant degree. We may review them from three perspectives to discover their contribution to theological anthropology.

#### **3.3.2.1 The Direct Revelation of the Nature of Human Being**

In the debate about Christ, the Church fathers provided the fundamental concept of *homoousion* to affirm Christ as true God. This concept not only explains the incarnation but also defines revelation. Revelation is worthy of the name due to the fact that it is the *self-revelation* of God. With this concept, the Church fathers countered the heresies that denied Christ as God incarnate with true and full deity. It is fair to say that Christian faith and theology must take its stand on the confession of the *homoousion*. In parallel fashion, the Church fathers also asserted that Christ's true and

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deity while they are integrated in one personal subject. The integrity contains a certain order. This is what Torrance means to say about the relation between Christ's person and work.

full humanity is another necessary facet of the incarnation. God became a real man rather than a man-like phantom. But this facet seems not to be definitive for the notion of revelation, for it is Christ's deity rather than his humanity that legitimates divine revelation. Therefore we usually think of Christ's revelation as the provider of immediate or direct knowledge of God. As to knowledge of humankind, we often regard it as an inference from but not the direct content of revelation. This thinking is not basically wrong, but very narrow.<sup>113</sup> Its consequence often manifests itself in an inclination to make Christology focus only on the God who is incarnate and make theology no more than an expounding of God's being and doing. If we talk too much from the angle of humankind, we deviate from the direct revelation in Christ. This partially explains why "the place of anthropology in theology" can become such a controversial issue among theologians, as we see from the Brunner-Barth controversy.<sup>114</sup>

Torrance, however, broadens our vision beyond the narrow understanding of revelation. He considers the revelatory significance of the *homoousion* to be not only from Christ's deity but also from his humanity. In other words, Christ is *homoousious* with humankind also and in such a profound sense that his humanity is not just real but *vicarious*. This implies that, as the vicarious human being, Christ directly reveals not simply Himself as God, but himself as man and therefore reveals *our* human

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<sup>113</sup> There is no intention of denying here the basic conviction of theological anthropology claimed in the previous chapter, that self-knowledge is reflective of God-knowledge. The point here falls simply on how we should observe the revelation of Christ more in the round, but this actually confirms the previous chapter.

<sup>114</sup> Refer to the footnote 13 of the previous chapter.

nature and life. Our reality is by no means secondhand knowledge or an inferior revelation from God. It is actually also incarnate and embodied *by God Himself*. By emphasizing Christ's vicarious humanity, Torrance helps us see that Christ is an *immediate* revelation of self-knowledge also. This marks a remarkable development that he has made in thought on the basis of patristic theology. He not only comprehended patristic teaching but explored it more deeply. While the Church fathers set a solid foundation for theology on Christ's deity, Torrance went further in exposing the significance of Christ's humanity. Without doubt, Torrance's discovery opens a new door for theological anthropology. We may now see it more clearly from the following aspects.

### **3.3.2.2 The Full Affirmation of Responsibility from the Human Side**

One of the controversial issues between Brunner and Barth is about the subjective responsibility of humankind. Brunner considers the function of intelligence positively in order to affirm the responsibility of humankind in their relationship to God. Barth opposed Brunner in order to defend the conviction that salvation is by God's grace in Christ alone. To be fair, Brunner did not mean to deny the Reformed conviction of *sola gratia* and *solo Christo*, nor did Barth mean to reject our God-given responsibility. The difficulty lies in how to affirm both in the doctrine of salvation. As the controversy shows, Barth avoids talking about salvation from the anthropological angle. Except for the topic of sin, other positive discussion on human responsibility seems to be taboo in his soteriology. While human beings are fully responsible for sin,



they must be fully passive for salvation. To acknowledge any active participation from the human side would fail to acknowledge God's grace as total.

As a theologian with a deep appreciation of Barth, Torrance nevertheless broke this taboo. His soteriology boldly affirms the responsibility of humanity *in Christ's life*. Due to his insight into Christ's vicarious humanity, he saw that we are saved not only by Christ's sacrifice on the cross but also by his life lived on earth as a man. The whole course of Christ's life manifests a *human* life characterized by the movement of *active* response to God, and this life is not external to us but is *our* life which Christ lived vicariously in *our* place. Such an active and vicarious human life constitutes a necessary link in Christ's entire revelation and salvation. If we may not ignore it, it follows that we must acknowledge the all important truth, that the active response from the human side does participate fully in God's plan of salvation. Its surety is that the incarnate God has Himself confirmed, disclosed and secured it. We may thereby claim without reserve that according to what Christ has revealed, our active response does matter for salvation.

This point reveals that salvation is not a mere remission of sin in the forensic sense but the real rebirth of humanity in the ontological sense. Because Christ has completely fulfilled all human responsibility in his vicarious human life, humanity is intrinsically purified and sanctified. This shows us that, as humanity must take responsibility for sin, salvation in Christ has indeed dealt with the problem of responsibility *from the human side*. Without affirming human responsibility explicitly and positively, the doctrine of salvation would hardly escape from seeing forgiveness

simply as God's sentence of forgiveness bypassing human responsibility, as God's waiving the judgement due to us and declaring us not guilty in the legalistic sense because of Christ – regardless of how greatly this might testify to God's grace. Does Torrance's soteriology violate the Reformed conviction of *sola gratia* and *solo Christo*? The answer must be, not at all. He does acknowledge human responsibility but his acknowledgement of human responsibility is of one that takes place only in Christ who is identified primarily as the *God* who is incarnate. It is this incarnate God who is found to be the *vicarious* human being rather than simply an *exemplary* model.<sup>115</sup> In fact, the unique significance of the term *vicarious* makes us see God's grace even more deeply, for his grace is so complete that God even steps down to *fulfill our responsibility for us*. In depth, such a conception of God surpasses others such as God's seeking us, embracing us, paying the price of sin for us and pronouncing us free. We may justifiably argue that in his exposition of the grace of God Torrance has taken a step beyond Barth and that he provides a more balanced interpretation of *sola gratia* and *solo Christo* without sacrificing the necessary responsibility inherent in human nature.

### **3.3.2.3 The New Vision of the Relationship of God and Humankind**

The relationship between God and humankind is a key issue in Christology and soteriology. To think the relationship in a dualistic way usually brings about difficulty in understanding the incarnation and incarnational salvation. Dualism makes one

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<sup>115</sup> We should not confuse Torrance's concept of 'vicarious' humanity with any kind of model theory which thinks of Christ just as a moral model.

unable to deal with the event of *God really made flesh* as it is. Its influence is also seen in the inclination to marginalize the incarnation, dislodging it from the center of the salvation story, or, even if the incarnation is explained properly, treating it only as a preparation for actual atonement. The substance of salvation then rests ultimately only upon the crucifixion rather than on the incarnation also. Many Reformed theologians have been aware of the detrimental dangers of dualism and made efforts to change it.<sup>116</sup> In fact, Reformed theology has produced insightful teaching on the integrity of Christ's being and doing which gives a clue as to how to make the change. This insight nevertheless does not often get unpacked nearly sufficiently. Most of the time, we merely acknowledge the integrity of Christ's person and work from a surface level, where the act of atoning sacrifice on the cross is undertaken by God incarnate. There seems to be no deeper meaning with which to integrate incarnation and atonement. This interpretation may not be wrong but it does not completely solve the dualistic understanding of the God-human relationship. It explains God's redeeming grace but not the necessary unitary relationship between God and humankind in Christ.

In his Christology and soteriology, Torrance has completed the conversion in how we conceive the relationship. Through seeing Christ as the incarnate God who becomes the vicarious human being, Torrance elucidated the substantive connection between the incarnation and the atonement, that the "the incarnation is inherently

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<sup>116</sup> For instance, Brunner and Barth both wanted to break the dualistic framework of "the subject vs. the object" when regarding the God-human relationship. They just tried different ways. Brunner considers both God and humankind as subjects. Barth insists on God as the only subject and downplays the object side, i.e. he only emphasizes knowledge of God and downplays knowledge of humankind.

atoning and the atonement is intrinsically incarnational.”<sup>117</sup> That is to say, first and foremost, the incarnation itself reveals the substance of at-one-ment, the bringing of humanity into unity with God. As a result, the whole process of atonement is the incarnation worked out: *God made flesh* is not an event which took place only at the time of Christ’s birth but an event which is on-going throughout the entire course of Christ’s life, death, resurrection and ascension. At each stage, Christ acts as *God-man* concurrently in his divine and human natures united in his one person. It is the unity of God and humanity in his person which lies at the heart of and runs throughout the atonement. The dynamic conception of incarnational atonement means the complete abandonment of the dualistic separation between God and humankind and from beginning to end confirms the oneness of the new unitary God-human relationship in the person of Christ. The concept reverberates around Torrance’s Christocentrism pivoted in the *person* of Christ, meshing with and crystallizing his insight into Christ’s vicarious humanity. That is to say, the atonement is achieved not merely *by* but actually *in* the hypostatic union, the significance of which points beyond a static and isolated concept of the being of Christ to its dynamic and vicarious implications for all human beings. In short, Torrance locates the incarnation (i.e. the person of Christ) at the very centre of salvation. He is able to mine from it a deeper understanding of the integrity of Christ’s person and work and rejects dualism with more convincing weight. Anthropologically, he brings us a new vision with which to examine *our* humanity in the unitary framework of the God-human relationship founded on Christ, for in him

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<sup>117</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, “The Incarnate Saviour: T. F. Torrance On The Atonement” in *An Introduction To Torrance Theology* (ed. Gerrit Scott Dawson, London: T&T Clark, 2007), 36.

*our* relation with God has been transferred into a new category, and *our* human nature has been renewed by this new category. It is Christ's atoning incarnation and incarnational atonement that has inverted the concept of a dualistic relation and in its place established the concept of a unitary relationship.

Considering the three aspects together, we see that through his exposition of Christ and his atonement in coherence with the direct revelation of the incarnation, Torrance has succeeded in delivering an inspiring Christocentric anthropology. Its core content can be summarized like this: *In salvation, human beings are brought into a unitary relationship with God in Christ, in which and in whom their response to God is one of active obedience throughout the whole course of life to the final destiny of union with God and participating eternally in God's life.* At the heart of such knowledge lies the portrayal of humanity as the unique *imago Dei*, distinct from other creatures and this interpretation revealingly uncovers the dynamic character of the *imago*. Torrance views it from the perspective of Christ's vicarious human *life* rather than from any static conception of human *being*. This distinguishes it from any ontological interpretation derived from an anthropocentric approach and while this conception of the *imago* vigorously demands human responsibility, it does not credit human beings with having any intrinsic properties of the *imago*. The so-called "remnant *imago*" finds no foothold in them. Nevertheless this *imago* does have ontological validity and material relevance for all human beings because Christ has achieved it, not just as an example but vicariously. The impact of this is the inspiring truth that being the *imago Dei* is not merely the goal we must make an effort to achieve through following Christ, but is actually the *destiny* that has already been

fulfilled and confirmed for us in him. It is knowledge of this destiny that impels us moment by moment to follow Christ as in him we respond to God in active obedience throughout our whole life. The image of God in us must be a *living image*.

## Summary

To summarise the discussion above, we may conclude that Torrance's Christology and soteriology demonstrate a clear inheritance from the patristic confession, Reformed teaching and Barthian Christocentric conviction. Torrance has succeeded in comprehending the essence of all three and developing his own further interpretation of Christ. In his interpretation, Christ is not only the incarnate God but also the vicarious human being. He is himself the mediation between God and humankind and as the mediator works from both sides. The incarnation defines salvation as being fundamentally the complete reconciliation of God and humankind in the full restoration of the relationship between them. The atonement goes well beyond the forensic remission of sin and signifies, together with the incarnation, the ontological regeneration of humanity. Salvation points finally to the exaltation of humanity into relational union with God. All of these are embodied in the person of Christ and fulfilled by his death *and* his life, his whole life, death, resurrection and ascension. In him we see the reality of God as well as the reality of humanity. Jesus himself is the revelation of both.

The most distinctive insight in Torrance's Christology and soteriology is the vicarious humanity of Christ. Through expounding the whole vicarious nature of

Christ's humanity, Torrance brought to light the atoning significance of Christ's human life and uncovered the real meaning of God's act of saving humanity *out of* sin. This insight enables us to fully acknowledge the active responsibility of humanity in the doctrine of salvation without diminishing God's grace. It also convincingly rejects the dualistic view of *our* relationship with God by changing our abstract concept of the God-human relationship for the personal one found in Christ in the hypostatic union. Most meaningfully, it provides a direction for theological anthropology, one built upon the *immediate* revelation of God. As Jesus Christ is not only a real and perfect human being but the vicarious human being, we may confidently see ourselves in him rather than just see him as an external model for us. Without this conviction, we can hardly have any real confidence to declare the objective fulfillment of our salvation. As God has achieved and embodied in Himself the knowledge of our human reality and destiny, we may confidently affirm the place of positive anthropological knowledge in theocentric theology. Without this confidence, we will miss the deepest meaning of the inseparable unity between God-knowledge and self-knowledge. In these terms, Torrance has made a significant reconstructive contribution to theological anthropology. Does this reconstruction contain any flaw? Yes, as we will observe through further discussion in the following chapters.

## Chapter 4

### Torrance's Doctrine of the Trinity in Anthropological Perspective

As a Reformed theologian indebted to Calvin, Torrance is convinced that self-knowledge is reflexive of God-knowledge.<sup>1</sup> He asserts, "Calvin laid it down from the very start that there can be no true knowledge of man except *within* our knowledge of God."<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the doctrine of humanity is not only subordinate to, but is also contained within the doctrine of God. Why so? He explains,

Man is a creature in total dependence of being, and motion, and life, upon the gracious will of God. He is created out of nothing, and has neither origin nor being in himself, but is given being, and maintained in being, by the grace of God. *In relation to God, therefore, man is only an image.* That is to say, *his life is absolutely reflexive of the action of God, and can be lived only in a motion of continued reflection.* This is a very important point in the Reformed doctrine of man, for it is just here that a decisive break is made with the Aristotelian man of scholastic theology, in which the living, dynamic relation of man to God is translated into a substantival and logical relation.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear for Torrance that knowledge of humanity as the *imago Dei* is thoroughly dependent upon knowledge of the Trinitarian God. Since humankind is only an image

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<sup>1</sup> This was discussed in Chapter 2 on *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, e.g. in the chart in section 2.1.3. Torrance makes it clear right at the very beginning of the book, that "Man's true knowledge of himself is reflexive of his knowledge of God." (*Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, London: Lutterworth, 1949, 13) This is the basic rationale for Torrance's theological anthropology.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology In Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 99, italics added.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology In Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 102-103, italics added.



of God, we cannot set norms for ourselves, but must follow the paradigm from the source. Unless we grasp the original truth grounded in God, we will not be able to understand ourselves correctly. This chapter will therefore focus on Torrance's doctrine of God in order to unfold some principles that significantly affect his anthropology.

## 4.1 The Trinitarian God

Christianity believes in a Trinitarian God, i.e. the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### 4.1.1 The Relational Being

For Torrance, the doctrine of the Trinity rests upon the cornerstone of the Nicene *homoousion*. The incarnation discloses that the personal interrelations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation are identical to the interrelations of the three Persons in the ontological deity.<sup>4</sup> The *homoousion* "pointed to eternal consubstantial relations within the Trinity and thus to the consubstantiality of the Trinity as a whole."<sup>5</sup> Although the Trinity is ultimately a mystery beyond our

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 136. For Torrance, the incarnate Son and Word is the connection between our epistemological knowing of God and the ontological being of God Himself. Cf. Kang Phee Seng, "The Epistemological Significance of *homoousion* in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 45, 1992, 341-366.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 10. Following the Nicene tradition, Torrance distinguishes *hypostasis* (i.e. person) and *ousia* (i.e. being) and asserts that the three *hypostases* are the one *ousia* of God who is "perfectly homogeneous and unitary, both in the threeness and oneness of God's personal activity, and in the threeness and

comprehension, Torrance is convinced that we can still apprehend it on the basis of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

#### **4.1.1.1 Persons in Relation**

Torrance indicates that the *homoousion* of the economic Trinity “refers to immanent personal relations in the Godhead.”<sup>6</sup> It discloses a wholly new concept of person, that is, “the relations between the divine Persons belong to what they are as Persons – they are constitutive onto-relations. ‘Person’ is an onto-relational concept.”<sup>7</sup> By the term *onto-relational*, Torrance emphasizes that the relations within the Godhead have ontologically constitutive significance for the Persons. He contends, “No divine Person is who he is without essential relation to the other two, and yet each divine Person is other than and distinct from the other two.”<sup>8</sup> From all eternity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit subsist in utter distinction; yet who they are is defined precisely by their mutual relatedness.

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oneness of his eternal unchangeable personal Being.” (*The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*, 155.)

<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 131.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 157. Torrance addresses this concept in several places in this book, for instance, pages 102, 124, 133, 157 and 163. Onto-relationality has been widely recognized as a key theme in Torrance’s Trinitarian theology. Refer to Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 59-61.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 156-157.

This onto-relational recognition of the divine Persons deepens and strengthens Torrance's understanding of the divine Being.<sup>9</sup> He points out that God has Being by being triune. The triune relations not only define the differentiation-and-unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; they also disclose that God is “essentially *personal, dynamic and relational Being*.”<sup>10</sup> The Trinitarian differentiation-and-unity had been elucidated by the Nicene theology to which Torrance subscribed. The conception of God as “personal, dynamic and relational Being”, however, had not yet been unfolded fully. This, therefore, becomes the focus of Torrance's exploration.

#### **4.1.1.2 Being in Act**

As we have seen in his Christology and soteriology, Torrance emphasizes that God's act and being are not separable in Christ. This emphasis is given further explanation in his doctrine of the Trinity.

Firstly, Torrance reconfirms the meaning of incarnational revelation. He alleges that God must be known as a “dynamic personal Being, for God is who he is in the Act of his revelation.”<sup>11</sup> The uniqueness of the incarnational revelation rests upon the fact that God's *revealing* and God's *being* emerge as one thing: the revealing

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<sup>9</sup> By focusing on the onto-relational concept of person, Torrance shifts the traditional question of “What God is”, which focuses on the attributes of God, to “Who God is”, which focuses on the personal being of God. The former is static and the latter is dynamic. This is regarded by many scholars as an insightful contribution to the doctrine of God. For example, Gary Deddo endorses it as being “essential to giving full theological significance to the Incarnation and the trinity of God.” (“The realist and onto-relational frame of T. F. Torrance's Incarnational and Trinitarian theology”, *Theology in Scotland*, volume XVI, 2011, 121.)

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 124.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 4.

action itself discloses who God is. Because of the fact of the incarnation, we can no longer imagine a static and metaphysical God, for the concept of God cannot be separated from the living person of Christ, who is God incarnate.

Secondly, Torrance appeals to the biblical revelation of God as covenant-making. According to the Bible, God manifests Himself as the Lord who actively makes and maintains covenant with humankind, even renewing the covenant in the face of human sin. This biblical revelation obviously differs from the static metaphysical notion of God as contained in Greek philosophy. Torrance points out that the covenant history attested in the Bible shows us a living God who actively creates fellowship with humankind despite His transcendental self-existence. The being of God is “known only in the fellowship created through his personal self-naming, self-affirming and self-giving to his people.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore God should be understood as a “fellowship-creating or communion-constituting Being” who is ever-living and ever-dynamic.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Torrance extends his demonstration to the level of the transcendent, beyond the concrete act of God in Christ and in biblical history. As a third point, he indicates that God’s dynamic reality is self-grounded in the immanent Trinity as the essential character of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit “is none other than the

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 123.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 124.

living dynamic reality of God Almighty.”<sup>14</sup> It is the Spirit of God that finally signifies “the outgoing movement of his being whereby he makes himself open to our knowing”.<sup>15</sup> We will come back to this point in more detail when reviewing the spirituality of the Trinity.

#### **4.1.2 The Relational Dynamics**

What, then, are the relational dynamics within the Trinity? In the Gospels, Torrance notices a double mutuality between the divine Persons, mutual knowing and mutual indwelling.

##### **4.1.2.1 Mutual Knowing**

Torrance regards Matthew 11:27 as the key evidence which “is precisely what we find in the evangelical account of the relation of mutual knowing between the Son and the Father.”<sup>16</sup> In his examination, the mutual knowing “involved a mutual relation of *being* between them as well”.<sup>17</sup> This is highly significant to him. He contends,

[T]he mutual relation of knowing and being between the Father and [the Son] Jesus Christ constitutes the ontological ground for our knowing of God, for in and through it our knowledge of God the Father is objectively rooted in the

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 209.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 214.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 77. The scripture passage reads, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (NRSV, paralleled by Luke 10:22) Torrance stresses this in several of his works, such as, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 77; *The Trinitarian Faith*, 58; *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 111; *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 44; *Theology in Reconciliation*, 223; *Karl Barth*, 214.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 58-59.

eternal being of God himself. ... Moreover, it is on the same ground that we know that the Holy Spirit who comes to us from the Father through the Son, as the Spirit of the Father and the Son, belongs to the one being of God, for there is a mutual relation of knowing and being between the Spirit and the Father and the Spirit and the Son, as there is between the Son and the Father.<sup>18</sup>

For Torrance, this mutual knowing is a crucial mark of the Trinitarian relations between the divine Persons. It discloses the *internal* knowledge of the triune *being*, and therefore secures the authenticity of the revelation. Obviously, the mutual knowing of the Father and Son has a primary position in Torrance's argument. He emphasizes that "any prior knowledge of God which we may claim to have" must be "reconstructed through our sharing in the mutual knowing of the Father and the Son."<sup>19</sup> The reason is, that through the incarnation of the Son, God the Father "communicate[s] his self-revelation to us in such a way that authentic knowledge of God is embodied in our humanity... and understood by us."<sup>20</sup>

#### **4.1.2.2 Mutual Indwelling**

Another dimension of the relational dynamics within the Trinity is the mutual indwelling of the three divine Persons. The biblical reference is from John 14:10.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 60.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 1. For this reason Torrance affirms that "we are given access to the closed circle of divine knowing between the Father and the Son only through cognitive union with Christ." (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 59.) The point is, as Colyer interprets it, "the intensely personal self-revelation of God and the fully human understanding of that revelation coincide" in Christ. (*How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2001, 66.)

<sup>21</sup> The scripture reads, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works." (NRSV)

Torrance approaches this biblical teaching through the idea of *perichoresis* as introduced by the Church fathers.<sup>22</sup> He explains that *perichoresis* comes from the Greek term which basically means “to contain”.<sup>23</sup> It discloses “the way in which the Persons of the Holy Trinity reciprocally contain one another while remaining what they are in their otherness from one another.”<sup>24</sup>

Although this idea is not naturally understandable, Torrance emphasizes it as an important facet of the doctrine of the Trinity. He indicates,

[The application of *perichoresis* in the doctrine of the Trinity] enables us to recognize that the coinherent relations of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, revealed in the saving acts of God through Christ and in Spirit, are not temporary manifestations of God’s Nature, but are eternally grounded in the intrinsic and completely reciprocal relations of the Holy Trinity. In this way the concept of *perichoresis* serves to hold powerfully together in the doctrine of the Trinity the identity of the divine Being and the intrinsic unity of the three divine Persons.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gregory Nazianzen first employed the term *perichoresis* with reference to the hypostatic union of Christ, i.e. how Christ’s two natures remain fully what they are while yet coinhering in one another. (*Oration* 18.42, 22.4.) Torrance thinks that this original use of the term ought to give way to its later application to the task of speaking about the mutual indwelling of the three divine Persons, for the original usage too easily results “in some form of docetic rationalizing and depreciating the humanity of Christ.” (*The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*, 102. Refer also to *The Trinitarian Faith*, 234, footnote 210.) Torrance indicates that Athanasius “developed the doctrine of completely interpenetrating or co-indwelling relations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which was later called the doctrine of divine coinherence.” (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 10.)

<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 102.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 170. Torrance also interprets *perichoresis* as “a sort of mutual containing or enveloping of realities”, also termed *coinherence* or *coindwelling*. This idea of mutual containing “is unintelligible in respect of natural objects” but “it is not impossible with God who is both within and without all things, and contains all things although he himself is not contained by anything.” (See the same book, 102.)

<sup>25</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 102.

In other words, *perichoresis* must be recognized as a vital component of Trinitarian onto-relations, for it guards the indivisible unity of God. Without it, God's united being and action will not be fully discovered, and we will not be able to identify the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity. For Torrance, "It is precisely here that the close relation of *perichoresis* and the *onto-relational* notion of the divine Persons can be seen".<sup>26</sup>

### 4.1.3 The Relational Essence

In the doctrine of the Trinity, Torrance expounds the essence of the Trinitarian onto-relations to be *love* and *communion*. He believes that both disclose the innermost nature of God.

#### 4.1.3.1 Love for Others

Regarding the triune being of God, Torrance employs another Greek term, *pros ti*, which echoes *perichoresis*. He explains that the notion of *pros ti* indicates "the kind of 'for to' relations that subsist eternally and essentially in God which are beyond all time, beyond all origin and beyond all causality."<sup>27</sup> The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are *for one another*, so that God's being is "*inherently altruistic, Being for other, Being who loves*."<sup>28</sup> Therefore the Trinitarian relation is a relation of love for others.

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<sup>26</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 63.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 157.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 131.



This love is “a dynamic kind of love in freedom”.<sup>29</sup> It tells the innermost nature of God.

Torrance further points out that such a dynamic and unconditional love should be understood “not simply in terms of the self-grounded Being of God, but as *the Being of God for others* with whom [i.e. humankind] he seeks and creates fellowship.”<sup>30</sup> He underlines that God loves us with the very love that God is, and that Christ exactly reveals. Elmer Colyer interprets Torrance’s point like this,

[T]he self-giving love for others, the communion of love with others, the freedom of love to others manifested through Christ and in the Holy Spirit for us in the activity of the evangelical Trinity *flow from and correspond to* the self-giving, communion-creating, free-flowing love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for one another, the eternal love that God is. ... And it is this free overflowing love of the Father (giving up the Son), the self-giving of the Son (even to death for our sins) and the self-giving of the Spirit (through whom Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for sin) that *reveals* what the love of God really is.<sup>31</sup>

For Torrance, the salvation effected by the economic Trinity must be the embodiment of the love of the immanent Trinity in our midst through the incarnation.<sup>32</sup> He argues

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<sup>29</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 313.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 123.

<sup>31</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 313, italics added.

<sup>32</sup> Torrance asserts that in the incarnation, all the three Persons of God are present and active in the realization of God’s love for humanity. This does not mean that the Father and the Spirit became incarnate with the Son, “but that with and in the incarnate Son the whole undivided Trinity was present and active in fulfilling the eternal purpose of God’s Love for mankind, for all three divine Persons have their Being in homoousial and hypostatic interrelations with one another.” (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, 162.) This assertion about the economic Trinity needs to be referred back to its foundation in the onto-personal relations within the immanent Trinity.

that our salvation attests to the essential love of the Trinity. It shows that God does not stay isolated in Himself and withhold from us the eternal love that He is; on the contrary, God's eternal love flows freely out to humankind.<sup>33</sup> In order to bring humankind back to God, and enable them to participate in Himself, God even self-surrenders to the point that the Father does not spare the Son in atoning sacrifice for our sins. Thereby Torrance alleges, "God has revealed that he does not keep himself to himself but loves us without any reserve, more, astonishingly, than he loves himself."<sup>34</sup> This becomes the uttermost manifestation and testimony of God's inner nature as love for others.

#### **4.1.3.2 Communion and Coactivity**

Torrance also confirms that the triune God must be understood as *Being in communion*. If "love for others" considers the distinction of the Persons, "communion" (*koinonia*) aims at the unity of them. Torrance proclaims that, though God is three Persons, these Persons "are Three *in One*."<sup>35</sup> The personal distinction between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is only known within their oneness. The oneness indicates "not simply a mutual indwelling and coinhering of the three persons, but also the mutual

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<sup>33</sup> It is clear for Torrance that for God this outward flowing of love must "be regarded as flowing freely from the ground and will of his own transcendent Self-Being." This is just like God's seeking the fellowship with humankind which likewise "should not be seen as something necessary for his existence as God". (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, 123, 132.)

<sup>34</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 166.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "A Sermon on the Trinity", *Biblical Theology* (Belfast: Sabbath School Society), Vol.6, No. 2, January 1956, 40.

interrelation and interpenetration of the distinctive activities of the three persons.”<sup>36</sup> Namely, the three Persons not only love and dwell in one another but also *give to and receive from* one another. It is “in their self-giving to one another and their receiving from one another” that they belong to each other indeed and form an “ontological communion” in eternity.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, the ontological communion of the immanent Trinity is also revealed by the economic Trinity and here Torrance points to the *coactivity* of the three Persons in redemption. He explains that God “in the incarnate economy” has disclosed to us the “real objective onto-relations in the eternal movement of Love in the Communion of the Holy Trinity”.<sup>38</sup> While the *homoousion* initially signifies the oneness of the three Persons in being, it further indicates the oneness of the three Persons in activity. The latter is equally important in the ontological sense, because God’s activity is inherent in His Being.<sup>39</sup> Torrance indicates that the gospel of John in particular witnesses “a significant coordination and unity of Being (*ousia*) and Activity (*energeia*) in the Holy Trinity, *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *in* the Holy

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 197.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 166. Torrance borrows the phrase “ontological communion” from Nikos Nissiotis, who utilizes the phrase in *The Orthodox Ethos* (ed. A. Philippou, Oxford, 1964) 43. See Torrance’s footnote 91.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 194.

<sup>39</sup> This point is recognized by Athanasius in his concept of *enousios energeia*. (*Contra Arianos*, 2.2; cf. 2.28; 3.65; 4.1f.) It echoes Barth’s teaching, as Torrance acknowledged, that “God’s triune Being is to be understood as his Being-in-Act, and his Act as his Act-in-Being”. (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, 194 and footnote 113.)

Spirit”, which he calls “the perichoretic coactivity of the Holy Trinity”.<sup>40</sup> He affirms that the coactivity of the three Persons in the incarnate economy of salvation is a necessary part of God’s self-revelation associated with the immanent communion of the three in the Godhead. Indeed, for Torrance, the knowledge of God “depends on the soteriological and ontological interconnection between the being and activity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation.”<sup>41</sup>

#### 4.1.4 The Fatherhood of God and the Father-Son Relation

One of the most important themes in Torrance’s doctrine of God is that God is primarily *Father* rather than *Creator*.<sup>42</sup> Greatly indebted to Athanasius’ theology, Torrance more than once appeals to his statement that “it would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name him from his works and call him Unoriginate.”<sup>43</sup> Torrance strengthens this thought with his accent on Christocentrism. He alleges that “it is the *Fatherhood* of God as revealed in Jesus Christ [within the Father-Son relation] that determines for us precisely how we are to understand the nature of his divine Being.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 196, 198.

<sup>41</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 314.

<sup>42</sup> By “Creator” God is recognized not only as the One who brings the universe into being but also as the One who needs nothing to define His origin and whose being stands by itself. In other words, the *Creator* is the *Unoriginate*.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 76, and *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 117. Refer also to Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1.34.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 118.

#### 4.1.4.1 God as Father

Torrance points out that “Father” is a *Trinitarian name* of God disclosed by Christ, the God Son. In Christ, God personally names Himself as Father. Thus this name should not be a mere title or epithet, but must be a *personal name* which is “bound up with the radically new understanding of God” inherent in the very Being of the Trinity.<sup>45</sup> What does it mean? Corresponding to the onto-relational understanding of person and being, Torrance explains that this Trinitarian name “provides the specific personal content of God’s name ‘I am who I Am/I will be Who I will be’”.<sup>46</sup> He argues: while God tells Israel about Himself as “I am who I Am/I will be Who I will be” in the Old Testament, the culmination of the revealing dialogue is found in God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ as testified by the New Testament. As *God became flesh*, Christ’s revelation of God discloses the very *being of God*, and not simply *something about God* on top of the Old Testament’s account. This is what the *homoousion* ultimately signifies. In other words, God is the One whom the incarnate God calls “Father”. This name is the name God uses to identify Himself *in and through* Himself.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 143, 144.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 15.

<sup>47</sup> Here the terms “in” and “through” are purposely employed instead of “by”, so that the name “Father” may be distinguished from the name “I am who I Am/I will be Who I will be” which is to be identified specifically with God. The subtle difference between the two is exactly what Torrance intends to emphasize so heavily in his theology: that God reveals who God is, not only *by* something about Him and external to Him, though it may also be *from* God, but *in* the form of *his very own Being* which becomes accessible *through* his own incarnation. It is what *self-revelation* or *self-communication* means. (About the features of Torrance’s view of God’s self-communication, one may refer to Paul Molnar, “God’s Self-Communication in Christ: a Comparison of Thomas F. Torrance and Karl Rahner”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, 1997, 289-290.)

Following the Nicene confession, Torrance also affirms God to be “the Father almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth”. However, in his eyes, this confession does not diminish but reinforces God’s nature as Father rather than Creator. For it “deliberately gave primacy to the concept of the Fatherhood of God” indicating that “knowledge of God as Creator is taken from knowledge of God as Father, and not the other way round.”<sup>48</sup> He asserts that God is the Creator of heaven and earth “only because God is eternally Father of the Son”.<sup>49</sup>

Torrance calls our attention to the different usage of “Father” language nonetheless. He underlines that God’s fatherhood is defined *only by the divine revelation*, and not by our human analogy. Our perception of fatherhood when it comes to God must undergo a transformation from the common usage. He explains that the biblical use of “Father” applied to God is “utterly different from its ordinary use when applied to a human being.”<sup>50</sup> For example, God is not like a human father who has a male image. This is not only because the second commandment of the Decalogue has clearly prohibited the creation of any image of God, but more importantly because the Trinitarian revelation of Christ discloses God as *Spirit*. Given that Spirit is intrinsic to God’s Being, we must understand God, the Father Almighty,

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 76.

<sup>49</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 142-143.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 57.

“in an essentially spiritual way, and of course in a completely genderless way.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, we should not think of the Father’s begetting the Son after the analogy of giving birth among human beings. Actually the fact is just the opposite – “we know him as Father in himself in an utterly unique and incomparable way which then becomes the controlling standard by reference to which all notions of creaturely fatherhood and sonship are to be understood.”<sup>52</sup>

If the content of God’s fatherhood cannot be learned from human analogies, where then can it be learned? Torrance’s answer is: from the Cross. Torrance views the Cross as the “window into the heart of God”, guiding us to see the *unique fatherly love* deep in God’s nature.<sup>53</sup> He indicates, “it is in the Cross of Jesus Christ above all that God has both exhibited the very Nature of his Being as Love and has irrevocably committed his Being to relationship with us in unconditional Love.”<sup>54</sup> That is to say, God’s fatherhood finds interpretation in Christ as *unconditional and passionate love*, and it is disclosed in its full extent on the Cross. This love is what the Bible calls *agape*. It marks the very nature of God’s being and of His relationship to humankind as well. This point of Torrance is noted by Colyer as the “language-molding power of the gospel”, i.e. the meaning of *agape* “is not drawn from any fatherly or motherly human love toward a child, but rather from the self-revelation of God’s utter self-

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 158. We will examine Torrance’s spiritual understanding of God in the next section.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 69.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (revised edition, Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 11.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 5.

giving love, especially in the cross.”<sup>55</sup> This gives Torrance another reason to advocate that one cannot have access to the knowledge of God except on the ground of the atonement.

Torrance also draws our attention to the fact that *Father* is a twofold designation. He clarifies, “Throughout the early Church the *Father* was understood in a two-fold but indivisible way, as the one being of the Godhead, and as the Father of the Son, whose Person is distinct from the Person of the Son and from the Person of the Spirit – although, of course, the one being of God is known to us only through the Son and in the Spirit.”<sup>56</sup> This implies on the one hand that fatherhood *defines* the nature of God, and hence establishes the distinction between God and those that are not God; on the other hand, the fatherhood of God *is defined* by the ontological relations within the Trinity and hence indicates the personal distinction of the Father from the Son and Spirit. These two definitions are *indivisible* because the latter decides the former. It is the immanent Trinitarian relation that establishes our understanding of God as the Father, for God’s fatherhood refers to nothing outside of God. Our recognition of God as Father is based upon the Trinitarian relation alone. For Torrance, the Trinitarian relation uniquely integrates who God is and how we know God. Such an understanding cannot be derived from God’s relation to creation.

#### **4.1.4.2 The Father-Son Relation**

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<sup>55</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 146.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 78.



In conformity to his insistence that God should be known as Father according to the Son, Torrance emphasizes that the Father-Son relation is the foundation and centre of the Gospel and theology. He contends,

In accordance with the apostolic tradition the Church concentrated upon the *primacy* and *centrality* of the Father/Son relation which it found in the Gospel and high-lighted it in the Creed, for it was precisely on and around that relation that everything else in the Gospel seemed to be built. ... [I]t was by reference to the inner relation of the Son to the Father in the centre of its faith that the Church formulated its understanding of everything else: creation, salvation, the Church, the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.<sup>57</sup>

Torrance particularly takes pains to argue the superiority of the Father-Son relation over the Creator-creation relation. One of his arguments is derived from Athanasius' statement mentioned above. As Torrance interprets it, "In this statement Athanasius was reflecting the emphasis of the Council of Nicaea on the centrality of the Father/Son relation and its primacy over the Creator/creature relation."<sup>58</sup> He further argues:

The Nicene theologians contrasted [the] two approaches to God, from his Son and from his works, as from what God has *begotten* of his own nature and from what he has *made* out of nothing in complete difference from his nature. When we think and speak of God from the perspective of the Creator/creature relation, or the Unoriginate/originate relation, we can only think and speak of him in vague, general and negative terms, at the infinite distance of the creature from the Creator where we cannot know God as he is in himself or in accordance with his divine nature, but only in his absolute separation from us, as the eternal, unconditioned and indescribable.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 48-49, 56, italics added.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 49.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 49-50.

For Torrance, the superiority of the Father-Son relation means the unique *validity* of the Father-Son relation for disclosing who God is. Namely, true knowledge of God must come from the Father-Son relation alone, which excludes the Creator-creature relation. He explains, God “does not need relation to us to be what he is as the living acting God.”<sup>60</sup> In Colyer’s phrase, which is even clearer, “The incarnate Son’s filial relation to the Father reveals that God is eternally Father in himself as God *irrespective of God’s relation to creation*.”<sup>61</sup> More importantly, Torrance underlines that to consider God as God in His outward relation with creation would be to commit the anthropocentric error.

[I]f we try to reach knowledge of God from some point outside of God, we cannot operate with any point *in God* by reference to which we can test or control our conceptions of him, but are inevitably flung back upon ourselves. Even if we relate God negatively to what we are in ourselves, we are nevertheless quite unable to escape using ourselves as some sort of measure for what we think and say of him.<sup>62</sup>

By these arguments, Torrance rejects the Creator-creature relation, and singles out the Father-Son relation as the fundamental measure for theology.

The centrality of the Father-Son relation echoes the centrality of Christ. Torrance’s adamant Christocentrism is given powerful support by his doctrine of the Trinity. It is here that we find “the dynamic correlation between epistemology and

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 4.

<sup>61</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 141, italics added.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 51.

ontology”<sup>63</sup> in Torrance’s theology: Christocentrism not only concerns the epistemological issue as to how we can know God, but also concerns the ontological issue as to how God’s nature is defined. Consequently and necessarily, Torrance’s Christocentrism also affects how humanity is defined in relation to God. While Christology and soteriology supply the immediate information to anthropology in terms of the unitary God-human relation established in Christ, this relation relies more profoundly on the Trinitarian relations within the Godhead. As Kye Won Lee points out, “For Torrance, the inner relations of the hypostatic union and the homoousion in Jesus Christ are essential to the scientific formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>64</sup>

#### **4.1.5 The Spirituality of God**

Besides the fatherhood of God and the centrality of the Father-Son relation, the spirituality of God is another point that Torrance highlights in the doctrine of the Trinity and which illuminates his anthropology. It involves two important perceptions: the *imagelessness* and the *intelligibility* of God. Torrance derives these from the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

##### **4.1.5.1 The Imagelessness of God**

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<sup>63</sup> Kye Won Lee, *Living In Union With Christ: the Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), 70.

<sup>64</sup> Kye Won Lee, *Living In Union With Christ: the Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), 140.

The Trinity asserts that the Spirit is God and is of one substance with the Father and the Son. For Torrance, this confirms not only the deity of the Spirit but also the spirituality of the deity of God. He points out,

In the Holy Scriptures and in the writings of the Church fathers, the word ‘spirit’ was often used in an absolute sense of God, in respect of his infinite, transcendent, invisible, immaterial, immutable nature, in sharp contrast to the contingent, transient and limited nature of creaturely beings. ... In this absolute sense ‘Spirit’ simply refers to Deity.<sup>65</sup>

First of all, the spirituality of the deity indicates the imagelessness of God. Torrance contends: God must “be understood and expressed only in an essentially *spiritual* way”, namely, “without the crude use of creaturely or material images”.<sup>66</sup> This is proved by God’s commandment forbidding humankind to make any image or likeness of God (Exodus 20:4). Corresponding to the transformation in language, Torrance emphasizes that the terms “Father” and “Son” are an imageless reference, excluding any material forms of thought. The Father-Son relation “is essentially a relation in the Spirit” without material images.<sup>67</sup> In fact, the term “image” itself must be understood according to the imageless principle when it is used to illustrate the

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 205. Torrance clarifies that the term “Spirit”, like the term “Father”, has a twofold meaning: (1) the absolute spiritual being of God without adverting to the distinction of persons, and (2) the third Person of the Trinity distinct from the Father and the Son. (Refer to *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*, 148.)

<sup>66</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 194, 207.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 72. Torrance indicates that this is an important distinction between Christian thinking about God and Hellenic thinking about God, the latter of which recognizes God “in mimetic, anthropocentric images” (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 72). In another context, he affirms again that failure to know God in an imageless way is “common with the heathen notions of Deity abhorred in the Old Testament”. (*The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*, 55.)

image-relation between the Son and the Father as well as between the Spirit and the Son. Torrance indicates,

The effect of the doctrine of the Spirit on the doctrine of the Father and the Son may be discerned in the statement of Athanasius that while Christ is the only *Eidos* or 'Form' or 'Image' of Godhead, the Spirit is the *Eidos* or 'Image' of the Son. The idea that the Spirit is the 'Image' of the Son may be rather puzzling until it is realised that the Spirit himself is *imageless*. This implies that, since the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same nature, it must be in an *ineffable, imageless* and wholly *spiritual* way that we are to think of them and of their relations with one another in the Holy Trinity.<sup>68</sup>

Torrance explains further: in the Hebraic idea "all images properly used in speech and thought of God refer to him *without imaging* him."<sup>69</sup> They are "*pointing beyond* to what is unimaginable though knowable."<sup>70</sup> Hence, we must perceive them "in a 'see-through' way and *not* in any mimetic or descriptive way."<sup>71</sup>

How can we do so? Torrance's answer is: "within the bounds prescribed by the Word".<sup>72</sup> That is to say, the Word of God (i.e. the *logos*) defines the image conception of God, and our understanding must be in accordance with what God Himself says. In

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 194. Torrance clarifies: Athanasius stresses not only that the Son is the form of the Godhead, but also that the Spirit is the form of the Son, and therefore it is "made clear that God is to be thought of in an imageless way or in terms of imageless relation." (See the same book, 71-72. Also refer to Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 1.15.)

<sup>69</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 71.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 90, italics added.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father", *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (ed. Alvin F. Kimel Jr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 129.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), 90. This clearly reminds us of his emphasis in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* that we must "keep our minds within the bounds of the Word." Refer to Chapter 2 of this thesis, footnote 59.

Torrance's eyes, God's spirituality has an intrinsic bond with God's self-communication.<sup>73</sup> He claims that God is "intrinsically eloquent, speaking being" whose revelation is identical with His objective self-communication in His Word.<sup>74</sup> To penetrate the imagery-laden language and perceive God in a purely spiritual way demands that we perceive that the inner being of God is not dumb, but speaking. Failure to acknowledge God's own speaking will lead to idolatry, i.e. understanding God from a center "in the human self and its fantasies".<sup>75</sup> For Torrance, God "speaks his eloquent Word in the very person and work of Jesus of Nazareth [i.e. the incarnate Son]."<sup>76</sup> By this Torrance distinguishes Christian theology from Greek mythology which thinks of the *logos* only as "an abstract cosmological principle".<sup>77</sup> Thus, from another angle, Torrance has confirmed the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

#### 4.1.5.2 The Intelligibility of God

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<sup>73</sup> Torrance indicates, "The doctrine of the Spirit was developed naturally and properly out of the inner structure of knowledge of the one God grounded in his self-revelation and *self-communication* as Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 202.)

<sup>74</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 73.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 73. See also *Theology in Reconstruction*, 90, where he declares, "God is not imaginable. All the images we invent are idols of the mind, the products of our own imagination."

<sup>76</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 50.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 72. As Paul Molnar noticed, Torrance calls our attention to "the crucial differences between Nicene and Hellenic thought included the concepts of *word* and *activity* in addition to the notion of *image*." (*Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*, 49.) On the one hand, Torrance distinguishes the incarnate Son as the Word. On the other hand, he reverses the process and distinguishes the Word as the Son. He alleges that God created the world through the Word; and it is *because we know that is the Son who is the Word* that we call God "Father", thus acknowledging Him as the Maker of the world. However, if we name God "the Unoriginate" only from his works, then we would "not know the Son any more than the Greeks." (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 76-77.)

Torrance asserts that God is knowable. This is not only because of the Word incarnate but also because of the “Spirit of knowledge”. The spirituality of God also means the intelligibility of the divine being. He contends, “That God is ineffable does not mean that he is unintelligible, for he is intrinsically intelligible and knowable, and as such is the active ground and source of our knowing of him through Jesus Christ the Word made flesh and in the Holy Spirit whom he mediates to us.”<sup>78</sup> In Torrance’s belief, God is a rational being and the Spirit is “the outgoing movement of his being whereby he makes himself open to our knowing.”<sup>79</sup> He underlines that our apprehension of God depends heavily on the intelligible mediation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit “marvellously gives us access to the intrinsic intelligibility of God” and “mediates to us the truth of God’s self-revelation”.<sup>80</sup> He continues, “It is through communion with [the Holy Spirit], who is in Christ and is himself God of God, that we are lifted up to have knowledge of God as he is in himself”.<sup>81</sup> Torrance also contends that the intelligibility of God in the Spirit provides for us a *reasonable* stance from which to confirm the Nicene confession of the Holy Spirit as the “Giver of life”: “We must think of the Holy Spirit, then, as the creative, energising, enlightening presence of God who freely interacts with his human creatures in such a way as to sustain their relation

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 214.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 214.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 215, 214.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 215. In this sense Torrance has the idea of a double-mediation, for “The Word and the Spirit of God coinhere inseparably in one another.” (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 214.) Together they communicate God to humankind and therefore Christ the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit both make the mediation.

to himself as the source of their spiritual, personal and rational life.”<sup>82</sup> Due to the presence of the Holy Spirit in all the creating and saving activities of God, God “is not only living and rational being himself, but the creative and sanctifying Source of all things”.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, for Torrance, the Spirit does not just seal the intelligibility and rationality of God, but is the source of all intelligibility and rationality in the universe. Torrance thinks of the universe “as an intelligible whole” in need of a higher intelligible source beyond itself.<sup>84</sup> It is the eternal intelligibility of God that “ultimately lies behind all the reasonableness of the created order.”<sup>85</sup> This idea introduces Torrance’s insightful arguments on divine and contingent order which we will consider in the next chapter on his doctrine of creation.

## **4.2 The Trinitarian Paradigm for the Knowledge of Humanity**

In Torrance’s eyes, the knowledge of God has paradigmatic significance for the knowledge of humankind. That is to say, the Trinity provides the fundamental criterion for our understanding of humanity. Rather than being free to be decided by human will, the rationale of anthropology relies on the Trinitarian paradigm. It is in this sense that knowledge of the self is *reflective* of knowledge of God.

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 227.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 227.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 20.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 35.



How does Torrance's interpretation of the Trinity back up his anthropological arguments? Or more simply, how does the Trinity shape understanding of humanity? Torrance did not address this question directly and systematically, but it is possible to extrapolate the relation from his wider theology.<sup>86</sup> We will explore the question in three steps.

#### **4.2.1 What Is the Criterion for Defining Humanity?**

The primary concept in Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity is the onto-relational concept of Person. For Torrance, the *homoousion* of Christ reveals the Trinitarian relation within the Godhead. It reveals a new way to understand the concept of "person", namely that a person is constituted and defined by relations. This approach disagrees with the kind of philosophical ontology which treats a person as an individual understood primarily in terms of an inner "self". Rather, Christ's *homoousion* affirms *interpersonal* relationships as definitive of personal being. There can therefore be no abstract understanding of a person in isolation. Hence a purely ontological standpoint finds no support in God's revelation in Christ. Instead, the Trinity sets out a paradigm that considers the relational category as prior to the ontological category. Or to put it more precisely, this paradigm integrates the ontological category within the relational category. Therefore the ontological element

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<sup>86</sup> Torrance affirms the reflective relation but does not unfold its meaning in detail or systematically from the anthropological angle. As a theologian similar to Barth, Torrance has less interest in making explicit and systematic arguments from the anthropological angle. Thus his theology is finally a system of God-knowledge rather than a system of God-knowledge *and* Self-knowledge.

cannot subsist by itself but must associate with the relational element. This is what Torrance means by the term *onto-relational*.

This Trinitarian understanding of God provides the basis for Torrance's shift from an ontological to a relational framework when he thinks of humankind. On the one hand, this Trinitarian approach explains his insistence that humanity must be known in terms of the God-human relationship. As we have seen in previous chapters, the relationship between God and humankind marks the definitive index in Torrance's depiction of humanity. Human corruption and salvation are both expounded by means of the relational connection. On the other hand, the Trinitarian approach also explains his resistance to focusing on some inner property of human being. In his response to the Brunner-Barth controversy, he rejected Brunner who affirmed the remnant *imago Dei* and natural theology by emphasizing the inherent intelligent capacity in humanity.<sup>87</sup> For Torrance it is completely beyond the point of compromise that any inner property of human being should have independent power to define humanity ontologically: human being is defined only when the relational connection is fulfilled. This relation-decisive framework is not optional, but necessary, because it is determined by the paradigm founded on knowledge of God, i.e. the onto-relational concept of person.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Torrance does provide a certain acknowledgement of humanity's rational endowment in the second chapter of *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* where it reads as an agreement with Brunner. However, in none of the other chapters does he interpret the *imago Dei* from the angle of humanity's unique endowment. He also discounts its meaning for theology. Please refer to Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>88</sup> We should not think that Torrance is simply attempting to look at humanity from *another* perspective. It is not that Torrance chooses the onto-relational perspective from among many

Moreover, Torrance sees mutual knowing as the *leading* element in the Trinitarian relation and therefore emphasizes the dimension of mutual knowing in the being-constitutive relationship with humanity. It is this dimension that specifically makes the revelation authentic and it is this Trinitarian knowledge which gives him reason to highlight the role of knowing in the constitution of human being. That is why he places the accent so firmly on the bond between *being human* and *knowing God*: to affirm ourselves as human specifically demands that we first know God. Without knowing God, even our being human is put into question. This further explains why Torrance maintains his Christocentrism when it comes to anthropology, and since he regards Christ as the only revelation that makes our knowing God possible, he cannot imagine any other way to think or speak about our being human.

#### **4.2.2 What Is the Criterion for Perceiving Humankind's Distinctiveness in Creation**

The mystery of the Trinity is not only about the three Persons coexisting and knowing each other in one being, but also about their mutual indwelling and loving. It contains a profound truth that the three Persons are not confused with each other, but nevertheless participate deeply in the life of each other. The Trinitarian relation is a dynamic communion, not a static coexistence; the oneness of the three indicates an organic union, not a mechanical combination.

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possible perspectives from which to view humankind; rather, he regards the onto-relational perspective as the only and as the inevitable perspective, since self-knowledge must conform to God-knowledge. In other words, there is no other choice according to the paradigm seen in God.

Torrance has this unique relationship in mind when he illustrates the atonement. As seen in the previous chapter, Torrance considers the atonement as a thorough healing and restoration of the God-human relationship into full reconciliation in which humanity is not only forgiven and renewed, but also embraced and raised into a unity with God.<sup>89</sup> The atonement ultimately means that humankind and God become one in Christ.<sup>90</sup> But what does this at-onement relationship look like? Torrance illustrates the relationship according to the Trinitarian paradigm. The atonement relationship makes us indwell in God and participate in God's life, but we are nevertheless not confused with God. The God-human relationship in atonement conforms to the Trinitarian relationship precisely in this: that the relational parties mutually indwell one another, but without confusion.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Unity in one person is what the phrase *hypostatic union* means. Torrance believes that Christ's hypostatic union has itself signalled the atonement, and that the atonement is realized fully and only in Christ who is the hypostatic union. Therefore the atonement and hypostatic union closely and mutually interpret each other. The reconciliation and unity of God and humanity found in the atonement is therefore a kind of personal unity, analogous to the hypostatic union in Christ and found only in him.

<sup>90</sup> This idea may lead to *theosis* or the deification of humanity. (About this topic, one may see Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.) Torrance's theology is often noticed with the inclination of theosis. But Torrance does not agree that he intends to confuse the divine and the human. He argues, "What happens to this human nature, happens to it entirely in the grace of God, in the gracious will of God to exist in identity with this man, but in the grace of God it is raised far above anything we can conceive or imagine, and yet not in such a way as to cease to be what God made it, creaturely human nature. As the creator condescended to be a creature, he did not make the creature creator, but in its unity of existence with his Son, he assumed it into fellowship with his own being as God, the creator and Lord." (Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008, 228.) John Webster once noted that Torrance interprets the Christian tradition in a manner which is not wholly dissimilar from that of contemporary theologies of participation, but he does it "with much greater caution about confusion of the divine and the human." ("Editorial: T. F. Torrance 1913-2007", *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol.10, no.4, 2008, 370.)

<sup>91</sup> This relationship may be seen to echo the biblical teaching of "Abide in me as I abide in you" (John:15:4, NRSV).

For Torrance, this at-onement relationship with God marks the lofty destiny of humankind. Therefore we may consider it the ultimate mark of distinction of humankind in Torrance's theology, for the uniqueness of humankind lies in this: that alone of all creatures, humanity is privileged to participate in God's own life; and that this at-onement relationship is founded on the Trinitarian relational paradigm. This unique relationship of God with human beings is revealed and secured peculiarly by Christ in his vicarious humanity.

This gives us an important clue to understanding human nature. If humanity is singled out by the at-onement relationship with God, and if the at-onement relationship follows the criterion of the Trinitarian relationship, then the nature of humanity must conform to the essence of the Trinitarian relationship. Torrance unfolds the Trinitarian relationship as being essentially *perichoretic* love (i.e. love for others) which brings the three Persons into communion (*koinonia*) and coactivity. Accordingly, we may say that the nature of human being also subsists essentially in the *love* which is *for one another* and which issues in *communion in coactivity*. It does not point inwardly to what we are in ourselves, but points outwardly to others towards whom and with whom we act. This is true both of our relationship to God and of our relationship to our fellow humans beings. Here we see the deep hidden reason why Torrance does not feel content with the traditional understanding of human nature based on inward searching and emphasizing human rationality. It is only from this outward-pointing perspective that we can fully and fairly abandon the idea of making a direct link between human nature and the endowment of intelligence, whether before

or after the Fall.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, it is only from this perspective that we can avoid the deification of human nature in the atonement. That is to say, we are brought into atonement with God so that we might participate in the life that is love poured out for others, and not so that we can acquire deity for ourselves. This outward-pointing perspective focuses on the participation in the *perichoretic* loving communion of the Trinity, a participation which does not need to exploit infinity and almightiness to do so.<sup>93</sup>

#### **4.2.3 What Is the Criterion for Understanding the *Imago Dei*?**

In the doctrine of the Trinity, Torrance points out an important principle when thinking of God: that is, *imageless* thinking. By calling attention to God's spiritual nature, he proposes that God must be known according to God's self-defining revelation rather than through human experience. Nevertheless, this principle also has a crucial significance for anthropology, for it provides the criterion for understanding the *imago Dei*. Humanity can be truly defined as the image of God - *as long as* "*image*" is understood in an *imageless* way.

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<sup>92</sup> This does not mean that intelligent endowment has no place in human nature: it merely cancels its meaning as immediately definitive. In other words, our rationality cannot *directly* define our humanity, even while we are distinguished from other creatures in respect of intelligence. The next point will be about the meaning of intelligence in connection with revelation through the Spirit. More discussion on the role of intelligence will be carried out in the next chapter on Torrance's doctrine of creation.

<sup>93</sup> This helps us to understand better Philippians 2:6, "though he [i.e. Jesus Christ] was in the form of God, (he) did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited" (NRSV). As the incarnate God who vicariously lived as a human being in our place, Jesus manifested the oneness of God and humanity while still remaining human. In him we find the paradigm of our participation in God.

What does that mean? When we examine Torrance's arguments concerning the *imago Dei*, we find that it means interpreting the concept of "image" dynamically rather than statically. As observed in previous chapters, the *imago Dei* always has a dynamic connotation. In Torrance's eyes, there is therefore no static element that can encapsulate the image; rather, it is the dynamic motion of reflection that constitutes the image. Therefore we may claim that the word "image" is fundamentally a verb rather than a noun in Torrance's theology. It primarily means *to actively reflect* God, not just *the likeness* of God.

We may understand this point more clearly from his insistence on relational thinking instead of ontological thinking.<sup>94</sup> To a significant degree, relational thinking shows a more dynamic character because it concerns an outward interaction with others. In Torrance's Christology and soteriology, the God-human relationship depicts not only the status of, but also the movement between, God and humankind.<sup>95</sup> Since it is clear that relational dynamics can by no means exist statically, human nature as defined by the relationship must manifest this dynamic characteristic. We should neither perceive the *imago Dei* as a fixed portrait, nor depict it by any static category. It has to be a living image defined by the reflective movement. Ontological thinking, by contrast, focuses inwardly on the attribution of being; therefore it can hardly avoid

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<sup>94</sup> We have clarified that Torrance does not generally deny ontology. What he disagrees with is purely ontological thinking, namely, the kind of process that starts from and concentrates on the abstract substance of a thing in isolation. Torrance's theology manifests the *onto-relational* character of being, in which the ontological category submits to the relational category. This undoubtedly relates to his conviction of "being in relation", namely that *relation* has constitutive significance for *being*.

<sup>95</sup> For example, that the relationship is corrupted by sin illustrates not only the situation of separation between God and humankind but also our movement of alienation away from God who responds with His resisting and judging dynamics.

thinking of the *imago Dei* as the *likeness* of God that humankind possesses as an ontological property. Although many of the properties of humanity are not figurative (e.g. the capacity for intelligence), Torrance still refuses to use them to define God's image in humanity; for to anchor the definition of "image" in these "inward" qualities would mean still anchoring it to a static pattern and transgressing the principle of imageless thinking. This may explain why he noted Calvin's acknowledgment of human intelligence and conscience, yet downplayed them in his own arguments about human nature.

#### **4.3 Critique – The Christocentric Premiss for the Relational Framework**

It is reasonable to conclude that Torrance's insistence on defining humanity in terms of the God-human relationship is derived from his perception of the Trinity. The Trinitarian *persons-in-relation* informs his relational concept of being, in which he approaches ontological knowledge through the knowledge of relation. This idea is often recognized as similar to John Macmurray's philosophy, which emphasizes the understanding of "person" in terms of the "You and I" relation. However, while it is worth noticing the similarity, Torrance ultimately differs from such philosophical thinkers. As a theologian Torrance's relational framework is underpinned by his Christocentric premiss. We have seen this premiss in his doctrine of the Trinity which emphasizes the primacy and centrality of the Father-Son relation. Now we want to ask: what does it mean anthropologically? Or to make it more specific: what does this



Trinitarian-Christocentric premiss mean for the God-human relationship? Our discussion needs to be extended from this angle. Accordingly, we will compare Torrance with John Macmurray at some key points in order to see more clearly how his Christocentric premiss affects his argument and conclusions.

#### 4.3.1 In Comparison with Macmurray

John Macmurray was Torrance's contemporary and is noted as a philosopher who influenced Torrance's insistence on the need to think about the person in terms of relation.<sup>96</sup> In brief, Macmurray's philosophy militates against dualistic, individualistic and static understandings of the self, in which the self is conceived as a cognitive subject who observes others as objects.<sup>97</sup> Instead, he claims that "the Self is a *person*, and that personal existence is *constituted* by the relation of persons."<sup>98</sup> From this standpoint, Macmurray transforms "the self as subject" into "the self as agent", and promotes a relational and personal thinking of the self. Specifically, the self "has its being in its relationship" and "this relationship is necessarily personal",<sup>99</sup> so that

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<sup>96</sup> John Macmurray (1891-1976) was a Scottish philosopher known for his relational thinking concerning the person. He held the Chair of Moral Philosophy (1944-58) at the University of Edinburgh, which Torrance also joined (1950-76). In the Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow in 1954, Macmurray presented his thoughts on "the self as agent" and "persons in relation", which were later published as two volumes under the same titles, *The Self as Agent* (1957) and *Persons in Relation* (1961). As David Fergusson indicates, "it is striking to note that the most direct influence of John Macmurray on Scottish theology is to be found in the work of T. F. Torrance." ("John Macmurray and Scottish Theology", *Journal of Scottish Thought*, vol.1, no.1, 2007, 139-145.)

<sup>97</sup> Macmurray contends that this way of thinking is isolated and egocentric, and fails to hold together the entire human experience. He identifies this approach in Cartesian and Kantian philosophy. Refer to *The Self as Agent*, 39-61.

<sup>98</sup> John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 12.

<sup>99</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 17.

personal individuality “is achieved through the progressive differentiation of the original unity of the ‘You and I’.”<sup>100</sup>

There are several insights in which Macmurray and Torrance can be heard echoing one another. Firstly, in order to avoid a static and abstract concept of person, they both underline the integrity or inseparability of person and act. Macmurray indicates that by a personal being “we mean to denote the whole manifold of entities, activities and relations”, and we “take the practical standpoint for granted”.<sup>101</sup> A real personal entity can never be separated from his or her action in relation. This recalls Torrance’s idea of *being in act* when he talks about God. He alleges that God must be known as “dynamic personal Being, for God is who he is in the Act...and his Act is what it is in his Being.”<sup>102</sup>

Secondly, for both scholars, *personal* relationship necessarily bears a dynamic character: Macmurray asserts that “the Self only exists in dynamic relation with the Other”,<sup>103</sup> while Torrance focuses on the dynamic elements of mutual knowing and indwelling in order to expound the personal relations within the Trinity.

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<sup>100</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 91.

<sup>101</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 24. He explains: “We know existence by participating in existence. This participation is action.” (See the same book, 17.)

<sup>102</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 4.

<sup>103</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 17. For Macmurray, *self*, *agent*, *person* and *an existing being* are synonyms. “Any ‘self’ – that is to say, any agent – is an existing being, a person.” (See the same book, 24.)

Thirdly, regarding the essence of personal relations, both men point to *love* and *communion* which bring persons into unity. Macmurray identifies positive personal relation in “community”, which “rests upon a positive apperception by its members of the relation” and unites them as a “unity of persons.”<sup>104</sup> Community “presupposes love” for others and aims at “the celebration of communion”.<sup>105</sup> This resembles Torrance’s illustration of the *perichoretic* love and *koinonia* (communion) within the Godhead. Furthermore, they both highlight the parent-child relationship as the basis for understanding the person-in-relation. Macmurray alleges that the mother-child relation is the starting point for personhood. It provides “the original pattern” and remains “the ground pattern” for our behavior and motivation in all personal relations.<sup>106</sup> For Torrance, the Father-Son relation is the primary and unique guide to knowing the Trinity and it is it which orients the whole map of persons in relation.

These insights explicitly highlight similarities between the two scholars. However, there is an implicit difference that distinguishes them on a basic level:

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<sup>104</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 147.

<sup>105</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 151, 147. Macmurray parallels “community” and “society” as two different types of unified relationships of persons: the former presupposes *love* and is for the sake of *friendship*, while the latter presupposes *fear* and *protection*. The celebration of communion only takes place in a community. He underlines that the positive apperception of community, as opposed to society, demands that we put others first and means that “self-consciousness is not primary but secondary; not a positive but a negative aspect of the personal relation. My primary knowledge is knowledge of the Other.” (See the same book, 160.)

<sup>106</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 66. After introducing the standpoint of understanding the Self only as a person in relation, Macmurray proceeds to “Mother and Child” in the second chapter. This chapter points ahead to all the other chapters, in which he further unfolds the concept of “persons in relation” under different categories (e.g. “morality”, “community”, etc.). For him, the rationale is, “Genetically, the first correlate of the Self is the mother; and this personal Other...is gradually differentiated in experience till it becomes the whole community of persons of which I am an individual member.” (See the same book, 80.)

Macmurray is talking about the self-knowledge of *human* persons, while Torrance is talking about the self-knowledge of the *divine* Persons. Moreover, as a philosopher, Macmurray seeks a universal application of these principles, which are applicable also to our understanding of human persons in relation to God. He has rather less to say about God, and does not specifically differentiate the “God and I” from the “You and I” framework.<sup>107</sup> For him, God is simply the universal “You” who sets the eternal ground of persons in relation and action. For Torrance, by contrast, while these principles perceived from the knowledge of God are indeed applicable to the knowledge of human self, the application is *not immediate*. In regard to the *human* person, we must discern in Torrance’s theology that the definitive framework of “You and I” indicates the *vertical* relationship between God and humankind *through* Christ, as opposed to Macmurray’s horizontal schema.<sup>108</sup> The difference is that the former involves two parties that are *unequal* in position, while the latter involves two parties that are of *equal* position. Although in Christ God becomes a human person and has a kind of horizontal relation with us, the relational characteristics are still distinct from those Macmurray depicts. We can consider this from three aspects.

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<sup>107</sup> Macmurray mentions God as “a universal personal Other” late in *Persons in Relation* (164), but obviously takes it neither as the starting point nor as the main concern in his whole argument.

<sup>108</sup> This horizontal character is clearly reflected by his emphasis on the necessary “social reference” for a human person. He alleges, “human behaviour is comprehensible only in terms of a dynamic social reference” (*The Self as Agent*, 38). What lies behind this emphasis is the concern for social justice and community which Macmurray has in common with many theologians in the mid-twentieth century. As David Fergusson comments, it is clear that “Macmurray has not forgotten the social, economic and cosmic dimensions of personhood. The maintenance of justice in the regulation of economic life is a necessary though insufficient condition for the creation of personal relations in a community. Justice is a necessary component of every personal relation.” (“The Contours of Macmurray’s Philosophy”, *John Macmurray: Critical Perspectives*, ed. David Fergusson and Nigel Dower, New York: Peter Lang, 2002, 47.)

#### 4.3.1.1 The *Love* Is Not Equal

In the idea of “community”, Macmurray emphasizes the mutuality of self-giving love that applies equally to all community members: for unless every one gives their self for the other, community cannot form.<sup>109</sup> But Torrance does not and will not place the same accent on the mutuality of self-giving in the God-human unity in Christ. After asserting the *perichoretic* love within the Trinity, Torrance derives an important principle for anthropology: because God *is* self-giving Love, He does not withhold but freely lets His love flow out to us.<sup>110</sup> It is this free and unconditional love that brings us into unity with Him. For Torrance, this love is revealed by nothing other than Christ’s atonement through his self-giving sacrifice.<sup>111</sup> He sees in Christ that God’s love is not only *unconditional* for humankind but also sufficient – and *self-sufficient* – to (re)build the God-human relationship. Indeed, the incarnation itself has indicated this relational reconciliation, and the whole course of atonement fully rests upon Christ’s living and dying *for us*. There is no possibility of an equal love flowing from us to God or Christ. Therefore the “God and I” in Christ *does not presuppose* the mutuality of self-giving, but relies on God alone. In this sense, the “You and I”

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<sup>109</sup> See John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 157-165. Macmurray asserts that the basic structure of community is a positive relation between persons who are “related *as equals*” and “for the sake of the other” (158). He illustrates a community as a group of persons “in which each cares for all the others and no one for himself” (159) and he emphasizes that the celebration of communion “must be a common activity.” (162)

<sup>110</sup> This love is *agape*. It differs from *philia*, the one that Macmurray talks about. In a certain sense, the difference between the two scholars reflects the difference between the two types of love in Greek.

<sup>111</sup> Torrance never speaks about God’s love apart from Christ’s atonement. In this sense, the God-human relationship is necessarily founded upon the economy of salvation (but not of creation). It therefore reinforces the Barthian Christocentrism in Torrance’s anthropology from the perspective of God’s love.

relation between God and humankind has less of an equally reciprocal character in Torrance's theology, as opposed to Macmurray's philosophy. This reflects the vertical rather than the horizontal nature of the God-human relationship.

#### **4.3.1.2 The *Role* Is Not Exchangeable**

Macmurray also mentioned the *unequal* dimension in the mother-child relation, i.e. the child is totally helpless and dependent upon its reference to the mother.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, we should note that Macmurray underlines the mother-child pattern in order to illustrate how a kind of positive reciprocity is constituent of the "You and I" relation, so that the two roles are exchangeable in his horizontal framework.<sup>113</sup> That is to say, a person can act sometimes as the mother and sometimes as the child: "You" and "I" can take turns to play the two roles for one another. But this will never happen in Torrance's framework based on the Father-Son relation. When we regard God and humankind as "You and I", we must remember that God always has the Father role while human beings always play the filial role. Even though we find a horizontal dimension of the God-human relationship in Christ, there is never any role exchange. This shows that Torrance does not consider a pure mutuality of relation without hierarchical order. For him, the mutual relation between God and humankind always

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<sup>112</sup> As Macmurray writes, "The baby does not feed himself, he is fed. He does not protect himself, he is protected. The provision for his various needs falls within the mother's care as aspects and manifestations of it." (*Persons in Relation*, 62.)

<sup>113</sup> Macmurray indicates, "The whole of this [positively reciprocal] aspect of human development ... falls ... within the 'You and I' of the mother-child relation. For the mother plays with the child, and the child responds; the child calls for the participation, or at least the attention of the adult, and for the admiration and approval of his success." (*Persons in Relation*, 59.) Put plainly, we *play with one another* as the mother, and we *respond to one another* as the child, so that we develop the "You and I" relation positively. It is in this sense that Macmurray acknowledges the mother-child relation as the original and basic pattern.

has an orderly character. It always presumes a God who is Lord and an obedient humankind.

#### 4.3.1.3 The *Act* Is Not Same

The last and most important distinction between Torrance's theology and Macmurray's philosophy concerns their differing conceptions of the dynamic character of being. In Macmurray's understanding of person, action is "the distinguishing characteristic of the personal."<sup>114</sup> He particularly emphasizes that *action has priority over knowledge*. He declares that "The human *differentia*...is not the capacity to think, but the capacity to act."<sup>115</sup> A human person should first be recognized as an *acting agent* rather than a *knowing subject*. In his view, to start from knowledge has dualistic dangers despite its methodological advantage: "It seems to presuppose an observer self standing over against the Other and gradually differentiating the Object with increasing distinctness and clarity."<sup>116</sup> But Macmurray does not mean to create another type of dualism which makes action the antithesis of knowledge. He clarifies, "knowledge is the negative dimension of action"<sup>117</sup> and

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<sup>114</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 24. In his eyes, "the mutuality of the personal" requires us to pay attention to "the primacy of the practical in human experience" and "to transfer the centre of gravity in philosophy from thought to action." (*Persons in Relation*, 12, 11.) It is practical action that makes one *personal*. Macmurray targets here the cognition-based concept of the self as *impersonal*.

<sup>115</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 27. Regarding the function of reason, he claims, "Reason becomes, then, the capacity to act, and only in a secondary and derivative sense the capacity to think, that is to say, to pursue a merely theoretical intention." (*Persons in Relation*, 27.)

<sup>116</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 86.

<sup>117</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 86. The term "negative" indicates "being *derivative* rather than primary". He claims, "Against the assumption that the Self is, at least primarily, a 'knowing subject', I have maintained that its

action itself includes knowledge. There is an integrity and unity of knowledge and action, but *under the primacy of action*.<sup>118</sup> Clearly, in regard to the dynamic character of personal relation, Macmurray's accent falls on the practical rather than the cognitive act. It is "I do" rather than "I know" or "I think" that makes the self an *agent* and establishes the dynamic relation of "You and I". It is also for this reason that Macmurray views ritual as primary, and doctrine as secondary in religion.<sup>119</sup>

Torrance, by contrast, has a high view of knowledge. He particularly underlines the connection between *knowing* and *being* when examining persons in relation. This is true for both the Trinity and humankind. For the Trinity, as we have seen, "mutual knowing" is the primary element that constitutes the ontological relationship among the three divine Persons. Christ as *homoousios* with God implies not merely Christ's deity but his perfect knowledge of God the Father. This perfect knowledge is pivotal in Torrance's eyes. Without it, revelation would have lost its foundation and everything based on revelation would become impossible. About humankind, Torrance emphasizes that *being human* must be bound up with *knowing*

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subjecthood is a *derivative* and *negative* aspect of its agency." (*The Self as Agent*, 11-12, italics added.)

<sup>118</sup> Macmurray explains: "The particular unreality which concerns us is the disruption of the integrity of the Self through a dualism of practical and theoretical activity." In fact he argues for "the unity of theory and practice under the primacy of the practical." (*The Self as Agent*, 78, 83.)

<sup>119</sup> Macmurray asserts, "Religion, therefore, has two aspects, ritual and doctrine. The first is aesthetic in form, the second scientific. Of the two aspects, the aesthetic is the positive and primary, since it...refers to the intention of action; the scientific is secondary and negative, since the means presupposes the end." (*Persons in Relation*, 174)



*God*, and knowing God comes from *understanding the Word*.<sup>120</sup> The human differentia indicates that humankind has been uniquely created as intelligent beings in order to understand the Word.<sup>121</sup> The foremost thing for a human person is to know God, “so that he possesses his life only as deposited in the Word of God.”<sup>122</sup> In Torrance’s opinion, “It is this knowledge [of God/Word] which forms man into the [unique] image of God.”<sup>123</sup> Such a conviction gives him an important reason to support Barth in claiming the absolute loss of the *imago Dei* after the Fall.<sup>124</sup>

However, neither does Torrance dualistically separate knowledge and action. In fact he openly appreciates Macmurray’s conviction that “knowledge in action is our primary knowledge”.<sup>125</sup> As David Fergusson comments, “In theological terms, what

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<sup>120</sup> Refer to Torrance’s interpretation in *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, which we have discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>121</sup> See Torrance’s interpretation in chapters 2 & 3 of *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*. It is obvious that Torrance would not endorse Macmurray’s interpretation of reason as being the capacity to act in the first place. Basically, he holds the traditional understanding which regards reason as the cognitive capacity, i.e. the capacity to understand.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 23.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 31.

<sup>124</sup> Barth firmly rejects the idea of a “remnant image” in fallen humanity. Associated with that rejection is his downplaying, if not outright denial, of the distinction of humankind from all the other creatures after the Fall. In Barth’s criticism of Brunner, one of his points is that even though a sinful man is not a tortoise, his reason does not give him distinction because it *does not make him more capable of knowing God*. Barth underlines this point with an analogy: “the fact that he was a man and not a lump of lead” is in no way to his credit when he is saved from drowning by a competent swimmer. Refer to Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (London: Centenary, 1946), 79. Torrance still treats human distinction as a necessary issue when examining humanity as the *Imago Dei*. However, he is convinced by Barth that after the Fall, the image has been completely defaced. His belief is that despite fallen human beings retaining the endowment of reason, they have lost the capacity to know God, and hence lost *the knowledge* that forms them as God’s image.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), 3-4. He writes, “It is Professor Macmurray’s contention that knowledge in action is our primary knowledge, for the knowing Self is an agent having his existence in time where he is active both in pre-scientific and in scientific knowledge.”

this means for Torrance is that the knowledge of God is always and only shaped in a life of faith and obedience to the divine Word that becomes incarnate in Christ.”<sup>126</sup> Crucially, however, Torrance departs from Macmurray in his understanding of *priority*. Where Macmurray prioritises the practical act over the cognitive one, Torrance would never do so. In the midst of similarity, this is a critical distinction between the two men. Although both hold to an anthropology which has a distinctive dynamic character, Torrance would never put *acting* prior to *knowing* when it comes to defining humanity in the God-human relationship. This connects closely to his emphasis on the objectiveness of Christ’s salvation. That is to say, our salvation in Christ presupposes nothing from our action, and does not need to be verified by our action.<sup>127</sup> It has objective certainty by itself beyond what we do. Therefore we must not regard ourselves as agents in the God-human relation restored in Christ. Rather, the only thing we can do is to know it correctly, that is, know the real God-human relation in the objective salvation. For individuals, unless one has this knowledge, he or she has no personal relation with God, regardless of how he or she acts. And for the Christian community, doctrine is by no means secondary to ritual, but must take priority over it and lie at the centre of religious life.

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<sup>126</sup> David Fergusson, “John Macmurray and Scottish Theology”, *Journal of Scottish Thought*, vol.1, no.1, 2007, 139-145.

<sup>127</sup> Only our faith in that knowledge does need to be verified by our action. What Reformed theology underlines is that our knowing God (i.e. faith) causes our acting in response to God (i.e. work). The order is not the other way around. As a Reformed theologian, Torrance definitely would not confuse the order between knowing and acting while he values the embodiedness of faith in life.

Ultimately therefore, Torrance's anthropology is very different<sup>128</sup> from Macmurray's despite the similarity of their concept of *persons in relation*. As a theologian, Torrance always has in mind the unconditioned pre-eminence and Lordship of God. Although human beings do find the self in the dynamic "You and I" relation with God, they have no power either to make this relation or to control it.<sup>129</sup> The relation at its foundation manifests an asymmetry. To a certain degree, this asymmetry corresponds to Barth's one-sided emphasis on God and explains Torrance's sympathy with Barth at least with regard to the God-human relationship.<sup>130</sup>

#### **4.3.2 Deification of Humanity: the God-human Relation Swallowed in the God-God Relation?**

Now we can have a closer observation to what the Trinitarian-Christocentric premiss means for the God-human relationship in Torrance's theology. In Torrance's theology, the doctrine of the Trinity provides many significant clues to his anthropology. It is indubitable that the norms and principles for understanding humankind must *image* those same principles in God according to God's self-revelation. However, in

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<sup>128</sup> It is *different* but it does not *contradict*. This is because theology differs from philosophy in respect of its basic rationale and ultimate concern. The former has a transcendent level above the latter, but not necessarily in contradiction to the latter. This is reflected by the fact that Macmurray never argued against Torrance's theology, and nor did he endorse it. While Torrance gave Macmurray's work distinct commendation, and borrowed freely from it, "Macmurray would hardly have endorsed the uses to which Torrance put his work." Refer to David Fergusson, "The Influence of Macmurray on Scottish Theology", *Journal of Scottish Thought*, vol.1, no.1, 2007, 147.

<sup>129</sup> By the term "make", we mean "to establish in the positive sense". Of course, we cannot establish a positive God-human relationship by our own power.

<sup>130</sup> It is interesting to note that Macmurray was not a sympathizer of Barth. As David Fergusson has noted, Macmurray "was generally critical of Karl Barth's theology with his dialectical shape", while Torrance was "a leading exponent of Karl Barth in the English-speaking world." ("The Influence of Macmurray on Scottish Theology", *Journal of Scottish Thought*, vol.1, no.1, 2007, 147, 146)

examining Torrance's doctrine of God, the possibility arises that his Trinitarian approach to anthropology could potentially lead to a certain deification of humanity. This anxiety is the result of Torrance's failure to address specifically and explicitly the crucial differences between the God-human relationship and the God-God relationship, the relationship of God to God within God. In order to address this anxiety, we need to consider more deeply his account of God's internal identity, and thereafter to open up its implications for the God-human relationship.

Torrance asserts that we should know God as "Father" according to Christ the Son, and that the Father-Son relationship should dominate our knowledge of God. He elucidates the reason for this from an epistemological perspective. Nevertheless, when he makes a doctrinal claim that "God was always Father, not always Creator",<sup>131</sup> an anthropological question emerges: what is the fundamental identity of God in the God-human relationship? The consequent question must be, what then is the fundamental relationship between God and humankind?

Needless to say, the God-human relationship inevitably dictates how we identify God. Torrance's statement that God was always Father and not always Creator may be taken to imply that if He is to be identified first and foremost as Father, and not as Creator, then we always relate with a Father God, but not always with a Creator God. If so, then we cannot *always* define our relationship with God as that between creature and Creator and the Creator-creature relationship cannot be a *necessary* and *fundamental* index for understanding the God-human relationship. But

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 88, 89.

if we do not always need the reference of the Creator-creature relation to regard the God-human relation, what is the necessary and fundamental one? As seen, it is the Father-Son relationship which Torrance singles out above all as critical.

However, when the Father-Son relation becomes the exclusive index *without the accompaniment* of the Creator-creature relation, the problem is that the relation between God and humankind has only one analogy, the relation between the divine Persons, and the risk is that the God-human relation may become assimilated to it. Indeed, there may be a risk that the divine-human relation is so absorbed into it that it becomes virtually identical to the God-God relation within the eternal Godhead.<sup>132</sup> In this sense there may be an ambiguity in Torrance's teaching about the vital distinction between the God-human relationship and the God-God relationship. We cannot help asking: How can we necessarily distinguish the former from the latter if the Creator-creature relation is not upheld as an equally necessary and fundamental index for conceptualising the God-human relationship? If God is always Father but not always Creator, where is the reference and proof for us to assert that we remain creaturely even as we share in the filial relation to God in Christ?<sup>133</sup> The point is this: how can Torrance avoid the deification of humanity, not because he promotes the Father-Son relation, but because he undervalues the Creator-creature relation? Or is it perhaps that he lets the latter be swallowed by the former?

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<sup>132</sup> As Elmer Colyer indicates, "God is eternally Father in himself as God *irrespective of God's relation to creation*." (*How To Read T. F. Torrance*, 141, italics added.)

<sup>133</sup> In other words, our filial relation to the Father is not completely identical with the Christ's filial relation to the Father. While Christ is the *begotten* Son, begotten not made, we are made but not begotten, i.e. we are *adopted* and not "natural" sons and daughters.

Torrance's chosen emphasis reflects his Christocentrism, in which he resembles Barth rather than Calvin. Generally speaking, the Father-Son relation corresponds to the economy of salvation, while the Creator-creature relation belongs to the economy of creation. By contrast, Calvin holds to a dual recognition of salvation *and* creation. These two knowledges go hand in hand and together provide the foundation for theological cognition. For Barth, however, his Christocentrism means that the knowledge of salvation becomes the unique foundation for theological cognition. Knowledge of creation is no parallel.<sup>134</sup> Epistemologically, Torrance sympathizes with Barth, which is why he singles out the Father-Son relation as having precedence over the Creator-creature relation.

By asserting that "God was always Father, not always Creator", Torrance affirms his Christocentrism in the doctrine of God, and appeals to Athanasius for support. Nevertheless, we need to notice that Athanasius and Torrance are not writing about precisely the same thing. The second half of Torrance's assertion is not an inference which must *necessarily* be drawn from Athanasius<sup>135</sup> and it may seem that in a certain sense, Torrance has developed Athanasius's statement into a Barthian claim, and that his Christocentrism has taken him beyond the position of the Church fathers.

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<sup>134</sup> The economies of creation and salvation have been discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Please refer to section 2.1.2 on Barth's single-focal lens and section 2.2.1 on Calvin's *duplex cognitio*.

<sup>135</sup> The statement of Athanasius reads: "it would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name him from his works and call him Unoriginate." (Refer to the footnote 43.) The connotation of "more godly and true" is not identical to that of "always".

How might Torrance himself have answered the above questions and concerns? In particular, what is the relation between knowledge of God as Father and knowledge of God as Creator? And also, if God is always Father and not always Creator, what is the guarantee of our creaturely humanity? It is not too difficult to piece together and work out from his various writings what would have been the shape of a brief response.

#### **4.3.2.1 Knowledge of God as Creator Comes from Knowledge of God as Father**

Torrance argues that all knowledge of the Creatorship of God comes from knowledge of His Fatherhood and that this is embodied in the Nicene Creed. “In its confession of belief in *one God the Father Almighty, the Maker*, the Nicene Council deliberately gave primacy to the concept of the Fatherhood of God, for knowledge of God as Creator is taken from knowledge of God as Father, and not the other way round.”<sup>136</sup> After quoting Athanasius’ key statement just referred to above,<sup>137</sup> Torrance then adds that it follows from it that all understanding of God as Creator must be taken from the Son<sup>138</sup> and proceeds to cite a lengthy statement of Athanasius in support.<sup>139</sup> He concludes that “for Athanasius the concept of God as Creator is wholly governed by

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 76.

<sup>137</sup> See again footnote 43.

<sup>138</sup> “It follows from this, however, that our understanding of God as Creator must likewise be taken from the Son, for it is through the Son and Word who is eternally in God and proper to his essential nature that God is the Creator and Maker of everything.” (Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 76).

<sup>139</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 76-77.

the coinherent relation between the Father and the Son” and cites Hilary also in further support of this “Nicene doctrine of God as Creator”.<sup>140</sup>

It is clear from Torrance’s discussion, that his statement that “God was always Father, not always Creator” is not intended to belittle in any way the importance of God as Creator. He is simply saying that God is Father before he is Creator, that his Fatherhood is basic to His Being in a way that His Creatorship is not, and that the only way we can know God as Creator is by being first restored through the Son to knowledge of Him as Father (and Creator), for it is only through the Son that the Father is known.

#### **4.3.2.2 God Can Be Known Only as both Father *and* Creator through the Incarnate Son**

God was not always Creator but now He *is* Creator, just as there was a time when the Son was not man, but now *is* man. We can only know God because He is *now Creator*, because *we* have been brought into being as creatures, and because the Son has *now become man in our creaturely being*. “God was always Father, not always Creator, but now he is Creator as well as Father. It is in similar terms that we may speak of the eternal Son who *became* Man. The Son was always Son of God, but now he is Man as well as God.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 76-77.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 88.



Both creation and incarnation are decisive new acts, new in the eternal life of God.<sup>142</sup> Likewise, “God’s communication of *himself* to us in Jesus Christ who is of one and the same being and nature as the Father, is something new to the eternal being of God.”<sup>143</sup> Once they were not, but now creation and incarnation ARE. All knowledge of God as Father is therefore now in and through these fundamental new realities.

For Torrance creation and incarnation go together, with the latter as the way to the former which can only be interpreted in terms of it. In the incarnation,<sup>144</sup> the Creator Word and Son assumes creaturely reality so that *in his own creaturely humanity* human being and creation itself might be restored to full reality. The incarnation and life of Jesus Christ are the restoration of creation and “in Jesus Christ God has established and secured a new relation between the creation and himself”.<sup>145</sup> In fact Torrance sees the work of Jesus as one that so undoes the tangled thread of human history and sin, “makes contact with creation” and “has set our life back on the basis of creation”<sup>146</sup> that in the cross and resurrection “*redemption and creation come*

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<sup>142</sup> That is to say, to create something different from His own being and to become something different from His own Being are both new for God’s life. Torrance underlines that “In the incarnation God was free to do something new even for himself, *for he was not eternally incarnate*, and free to move outside to himself.” (*Divine and Contingent Order*, 6, italics added.)

<sup>143</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 88-89.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 89.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 106.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: the Person and Work of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 131, 193.

*completely together*".<sup>147</sup> It is only through its renewal in Christ that creation is restored to be seen as it really is and was meant to be and that God can be fully known as Father.

#### **4.3.2.3 Incarnation and Resurrection Are the Guarantee of Our Permanent Humanity**

Torrance would argue that far from belittling or denigrating the God-human relation as understood in terms of God as Creator, a Christocentric approach actually strengthens it. In his eyes, the incarnation is the affirmation of creation and of humanity: the fact that the Creator Word Himself became flesh is the affirmation of creaturely human being,<sup>148</sup> and the fact that he rose and ascended in the same human body into heaven is the ultimate affirmation of the reality of creaturely existence for God in perpetuity.<sup>149</sup> Just as the Word assumed our actual human flesh,<sup>150</sup> so in the resurrection he rose in actual physical body<sup>151</sup> and in a body which as now glorious and "spiritual" is *not less*

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<sup>147</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: the Person and Work of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 220.

<sup>148</sup> See Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 65-66.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 65-66, 220f, 238-39, cf. 298-301.

<sup>150</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: the Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 61.

<sup>151</sup> "Jesus arose in physical body, arose as very man in the fullness and integrity of human nature." Cf. "Since human beings are the concrete reality they are, human resurrection in the nature of the case can only be bodily resurrection – any 'resurrection' that is not bodily is simply a contradiction in terms." (Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: the Person and Work of Christ* ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009, 241.)

*body but more body* because now freed from all corruption, death and wasting away.<sup>152</sup>

In his chapters on resurrection and ascension in *Atonement* it is abundantly clear that Torrance regards Jesus' resurrection "as very man in the fullness and integrity of human nature", together with the ascension, as the definitive guarantee of our own continuing creaturely humanity. Has he done enough to allay any possible anxieties about the extent to which he takes the God-human creature relation seriously? The coherence, force and logic of his vigorous Christocentric position can indeed be appreciated, but in emphasizing it has he given insufficient attention to human ability and in particular rationality?

#### **4.3.3 Rationality – Spiritual or Natural?**

Another question we want to ask of Torrance concerns just this topic of rationality. In the doctrine of the Trinity, Torrance highlights the Spirit as the *Spirit of knowledge* and the *source of all rationality*. He emphasizes that revelation also depends on the Spirit's intelligible mediation, which concerns not only how God reveals, but also how we know. Such an accent on the rational character and function of the Spirit inspires the question: If rationality is constitutive of the spiritual nature of God, is it then constitutive of *our* spiritual nature? Is our rationality a gift of the Spirit? What does the "intelligible *mediation* of the Spirit" mean from our side?

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: the Person and Work of Christ* (ed. Robert Walker, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 299.

In *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Torrance disagrees with Calvin's teaching on the "natural gifts" as being a portion of God's image in fallen humankind. Torrance places the emphasis on the spiritual (supernatural) nature of humanity, and identifies rationality in the human mind as "natural" rather than "spiritual".<sup>153</sup> He also asserts that how the human mind knows God is a mystery of the Spirit who appeals to no natural capacity in human beings.<sup>154</sup> Clearly, these arguments give a negative answer to our questions about the ability of the human mind to receive revelation. Is Torrance perhaps guilty of a kind of rationality dualism, where the *supernatural* rationality of the Spirit is pitted against the *natural* rationality of humankind, so that when the Spirit mediates the knowledge of God to humankind, there is no necessity, for real communication between the two, of any prior capacity to grasp revelation?<sup>155</sup> To acknowledge the Spirit as the source of all rationality, and then to discount human rationality as part of the epistemological equation, does not seem to make sense of our relationship to the God who is rational Spirit.

This contradictory situation would seem to illustrate a difficulty that Torrance apparently did not manage to overcome in his theology. On the one hand, he penetrates to the profound rationality and intelligible character of God (and

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<sup>153</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 83-105. Refer to the second chapter of this thesis, section 2.2.3. Torrance in this book responds to the Brunner-Barth controversy by siding clearly with Barth. Brunner regards rationality as the "contact point" between God and humankind. He also acknowledges it as the remnant image in fallen humanity. These teachings are opposed by Barth. Therefore Torrance's arguments here also express his disagreement with Brunner.

<sup>154</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 128-153.

<sup>155</sup> In other words, there is no *necessary contact* between the two such that the Spirit *necessarily* appeals to our pre-existing rationality.

creation<sup>156</sup>); but on the other hand, he does not want to give the human endowment of intelligence any kind of role in defining the *imago Dei*. His knowledge of the rationality of God is derived from his perception of a rational creation; however, his rejection of any role for unaided and unenlightened human rationality in the knowledge of God is the outworking of his understanding of salvation. Therefore this difficulty actually reflects the tension between the doctrines of creation and salvation in Torrance's theology. As he is convinced of the uniquely definitive position of salvation in systematic theology, he chooses to compromise the former and hold firm the latter. This may partially explain what we have just observed: his high affirmation of the Spirit as the source of all rationality, even as he denies the capacity of humanity after the Fall to comprehend revelation and so strips the spiritual color from the rational human mind.

## Summary

For Torrance, anthropology can be neither self-existent nor self-explanatory, but relies on the knowledge of God to provide the foundation for its existence and explanation. It is in his doctrine of the Trinity that we find the origin of his ontological-relational framework for anthropology. This framework explains why he insists on interpreting humanity within its relation to God rather than in the isolation of the human self. It

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<sup>156</sup> Torrance's emphasis on the rational intelligibility God's creation will be addressed in the next chapter.

also discloses some important principles for understanding the *imago Dei* in the light of the Trinity.

Nonetheless, we should notice the advanced Christocentrism in Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity, as in every part of his theological system. When he emphasizes God as "Father" alone and the Father-Son relation as the primary measure of our God-knowledge, his Christocentrism has become an ontological conviction governing the epistemological conviction, i.e. a conviction of *who God is for us* governing how we can know God. At a fundamental level Torrance excludes the Creator-creature relation from first place in his consideration of God's identity for us. This leads to an anxiety that despite his denials his anthropology may possibly be heading towards, or at least is not sufficiently protected from, a kind of deification of humanity, owing to the lack of a clear index with which to distinguish the God-human relationship from the God-God relationship. How would Torrance himself have answered such a question?

## Chapter 5

### Torrance's Doctrine of Creation in Anthropological Perspective

Alongside the salvific relation of God to humanity in Christ, the dependent relation between God and the universe in creation marks another axis guiding Torrance's interpretation of who God is and who we are. Although Torrance does not take this axis as the primary criterion for his doctrine of humanity, he does establish in relation to it several key notions that are crucial for his theological anthropology.<sup>1</sup>

#### **5.1 *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and Contingent Creation**

*Creatio ex nihilo* is a distinctive Judeo-Christian idea which means God created the universe out of nothing. It became firmly established as the teaching of the church in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian against their Gnostic opponents. Based on biblical teaching, Torrance interprets the act of creation as “the unique aboriginal act of God through his commanding Word in bringing into being what did not previously exist and giving it reality and stability before him.”<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, God made something utterly new which is neither from Himself nor from any resource elsewhere. On the other hand, God grants to what He has made a true and persistent existence, so

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<sup>1</sup> They are actually important for his whole theology in which anthropological thoughts are scattered and integrated with other themes.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 95-96.

that it is neither a shadow substance nor a state of chaos but a reality that can be recognized with authenticity and integrity. By underlining these two aspects, Torrance points out a pivotal notion – *contingence* – to illustrate the nature and order of the creation.

### **5.1.1 The Contingence of Creation – Dependence and Independence**

By contingency Torrance means that “as created out of nothing the universe has no self-subsistence and no ultimate stability of its own, but that it is nevertheless endowed with an authentic reality and integrity of its own which must be respected.”<sup>3</sup>

The notion of contingency delicately contains a “peculiar interlocking of dependence and independence” of the created world, i.e. “the world depends entirely upon the free creative act of God to give it being and form wholly differentiated from himself, but that is then an independence that is delimited by the dependence that anchors the world beyond itself in the freedom of the Creator.”<sup>4</sup> For Torrance, contingency is the “basic and essential feature of the universe” describing the “constituting condition of its reality and actuality” which is true not only in the original birth of the universe, but also in its continuing existence.<sup>5</sup>

#### **5.1.1.1 The Dependence of the Universe**

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), vii.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 37, and see his *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 217.



Torrance expounds the dependence of the universe as a necessary antithesis of the freedom of God. In his view, God is the One self-sufficient and conditioned by nothing. “Far from being immanently bound up with the universe, God remains eternally and transcendentally free”.<sup>6</sup> The creation is not something that must happen but something happened as God wishes so. The birth of the universe depends on the will and power of God, who creates out of liberty rather than necessity.

Likewise, the current reality is not something inevitable for God when He created. It is out of complete freedom that God created *this* universe with its peculiar appearance and form as it shows now. Being unlimitedly creative, God could have created a universe different from this one. The existence mode of the universe is contingent and dependent on God’s freely willed prescription for it.

Due to the unconditioned freedom of God in creation, Torrance asserts, “There is no intrinsic reason in the universe why it should exist at all, or why it should be what it actually is.”<sup>7</sup> In the fundamental sense of *being brought into existence* and *existing in this particular form*, the universe is not self-existing but radically relying on God. This seals the dependence of the universe.

#### **5.1.1.2 The Independence of the Universe**

However, in spite of that, the universe is not a shadow or attachment of God. It has an independent identity once it has been brought into existence. Torrance holds a

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 36.

scientific sight in theology. He sees the independent identity of the universe as the authentic reality of the natural world which also comes from the *creatio ex nihilo*. He underlines that the creaturely universe is not a part of God since it is made out of nothing. There are “a total otherness in being and a complete disparity in nature between the Creator and the creature.”<sup>8</sup> This absolute difference signifies that the universe must be identified with its authenticity and subjectivity distinctive from what identifies God.<sup>9</sup> In this sense the creation has its independence.

Torrance recognizes the independence of creation through its intrinsic consistency. He indicates, “[T]he universe is endowed with an autonomous character both as a whole and throughout its immanent relations, with features and patterns and operational principles which belong to it as by intrinsic natural right, and which require an autonomous mode of investigation appropriate to their distinctive nature and integrity.”<sup>10</sup> For Torrance, this fact is significant for both natural science and theology. It forces us “to treat contingency not merely as a presupposition, but as an essential factor in scientific understanding and interpretation of the natural order.”<sup>11</sup>

### **5.1.2 The Rationality of Creation – The Contingent Order**

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 207.

<sup>9</sup> This echoes what Torrance stresses in his doctrine of the Trinity, “there is no likeness between the eternal Being of God and the being of created reality, [therefore] God may be known only out of himself”. See *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 28.

The intrinsic consistency and intelligibility of the universe clearly impress Torrance. He points out that the creative act is an intelligent act. “Far from being merely an arbitrary product of God’s will,” the creation should be regarded “as ultimately grounded in the eternal truth and rationality of God.”<sup>12</sup> For Torrance, the Bible’s teaching that “the universe was created by God through his eternal *Word*” confirms the fact that creation “was neither conceived nor brought into being ‘without reason’, but on the contrary was an intelligible product of the divine Mind.”<sup>13</sup> The rationality of creation has a twofold content in Torrance’s arguments – the eternal purpose hidden in God and the contingent order displayed in the universe. We will discuss the latter first and leave the former to the next section.

Torrance contends that the universe is endowed with an inner order in which all creaturely things are held together as a whole. Moreover, this order is contingent in that it is not necessary that created reality should have a particular character or structure.

Natural science tacitly assumes the contingency, as well as the orderliness, of the universe. ...It is through relying on the indissoluble bond between contingency and order in the universe that natural science has come to operate with the distinctive interconnection between experiment and theory which has characterized our greatest advances in knowledge of the physical world.<sup>14</sup>

He acknowledges that this contingent order displays a rationality on which science depends. Contingent order is in fact the matrix of natural science. This idea

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 92.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 26.

distinguishes the Christian doctrine of creation from Greek thought which regards “contingence” as the antithesis of “logic” or “rationality” and hence at odds with the rational discourse or scientific explanation.<sup>15</sup> Christian theology instead affirms the modern scientific understanding of the universe, since it is “an inalienable assumption of all scientific inquiry that the universe is everywhere immanently rational and as such open to rational apprehension”.<sup>16</sup> It is necessary to ask “What is the kind of order that the contingent universe in its multivariable nature reveals in other aspects of our experience of it, for example when we have to do with live realities or events?” and we must answer the question “only out of the realities and events themselves, by penetrating into their own structures.”<sup>17</sup>

For Torrance, contingent order is grounded in the uncreated rationality of God. Corresponding to the idea of the dependence and independence of creation, there is a dialectical link in Torrance between the uncreated rationality of God and the created rationality of the universe. On the one hand, *creatio ex nihilo* implies that “God created not only the materiality of the universe out of nothing, but its very rationality and order as well, including the human mind or soul.”<sup>18</sup> There is a clear-cut

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<sup>15</sup> See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 100, and also *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1980), 53-54. For further discussion, see Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 170.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 16.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 16.

<sup>18</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 170. He also noticed its corresponding idea of the relation between God’s Word and human word in the mediation of revelation, which he talked in the same book, 100-113. Torrance’s arguments see *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 102-103.

distinction between the uncreated rationality of God and the created rationality of the universe, including the rationality of humankind. The two types of rationality are substantially different. On the other hand, the created rationality does derive from God according to His will and might as well as His wisdom and Word. The created rationality must be acknowledged as originated from and grounded in the uncreated rationality of God. It is a rationality that is dependent upon and grounded in the uncreated divine rationality. In Torrance's own phrase, God "makes his own eternal truth the creative source and determinant ground of the contingent order of the universe".<sup>19</sup>

Torrance points out that such a description of being both *absolutely-distinct from* and *necessarily-grounded in* is almost an oxymoron in Greek philosophy, but this oxymoronic dialectic is just what contingent order means in the Christian understanding of creation based on Biblical idea of *creatio ex nihilo*. It rejects the dualism between theology and science by affirming a unique rationality grounded in God *and* inherent in the universe. We will explore this further under the following three headings.

#### **5.1.2.1 The Unitarity of the Order**

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 21. This is why Torrance indicates that the contingent order "has also a contingent 'necessity' of its own, in the sense that it cannot not be what it now is as this universe possessed of this and not some other created rationality" (22).

Torrance claims that “there is one pervasive rational order throughout the universe” despite the fact that “the order inherent in the universe is manifold in character”.<sup>20</sup> While the universe indeed possesses different modes of rational order, they nevertheless do not conflict but contribute to the integral character of the universe. That is why scientific discoveries in different fields do not contradict each other but dovetail in consistency.<sup>21</sup>

In Torrance’s eyes, this one pervasive rational order must be the incarnate Word of God. He asserts, “[T]he incarnate Son or Logos, through whom all things were made and in whom they hold together, is the central and creative source of all order and rationality within the created universe.”<sup>22</sup> The incarnate Word not only granted the definitive revelation through God’s self-communication to the created world, but also “gave rise to the conception of the universe as one harmonious system of things characterized by one pervasive if multi-variable order throughout.”<sup>23</sup> For Torrance, it is the Word incarnate in Christ that has sealed the unitarity of the contingent order and thus “carried with it a rejection of the dualism, pluralism, and polymorphism of ancient philosophy, religion, and science.”<sup>24</sup>

#### **5.1.2.2 The Hierarchy of the Order**

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 17.

<sup>21</sup> Torrance write, “[W]e do not believe we are really in touch with reality if we come up with results in one aspect of the universe which conflict with those we derive elsewhere.” (See *Divine and Contingent Order*, 17.) As a theologian acquainted with the natural sciences, he does not come to this conviction ignorantly. Some of his scientific studies on physics and biology, for example, may be found in *Divine and Contingent Order*, 18-20.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 3.

The one pervasive and unitary order, however, has within itself hierarchic levels. Torrance indicates that “the universe in its immanent structure comprises a hierarchy of levels of reality which are open upward but not reducible downward”.<sup>25</sup> Appealing to some recent discoveries in biology, Torrance points out that there is “an ontological stratification in the universe comprising a sequence of rising levels, each higher one controlling the boundaries of the one below it and embodying thereby the joint meaning of the particulars situated on the lower level”.<sup>26</sup> This does not imply a disguised Neo-Platonist theory of the hierarchy of the phenomenal world and celestial beings, nor does it come down to a Darwinism evolution of species starting from the lower level as the root. By “ontological stratification” and “hierarchy of reality”, Torrance means that in the one unitary order with many levels “no one level provides the sufficient reason for its own contingent order which may be formalized only through reference to another level or to other levels beyond it.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, each level of the universe is not self-defined but subject to its upper reach, so that ontological order is from the top down. Examining the meaning of existence, he appeals to Michael Polanyi. “[A]ll meaning lies in the higher levels of reality that are not reducible to the laws by which the ultimate particulars of the universe are controlled.”<sup>28</sup>

### 5.1.2.3 The Openness of the Order

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 20.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 20.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 20.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 20. The original words see Michael Polanyi, “On the Modern Mind”, *Encounter*, May, 1965, 15.

Besides the unitarity and hierarchy, Torrance also explores the *openness* of the contingent order. He asserts that the universe is essentially “not a closed but an open system” since the contingency is not self-sufficient.<sup>29</sup> This means that the universe needs a sufficient reason above the contingent level to support and define the contingent order. This sufficient reason can be “disclosed only through correlation with some meta-level beyond.”<sup>30</sup> For Torrance, the openness is the deepest secret of contingency. It explains why “the nature of the universe as it discloses itself to us constantly takes us by surprise.”<sup>31</sup> Thus we are inspired to “discover an uncircumscribed range of rationality grounded beyond the universe itself but reaching so far beyond us that with all our science we realize we may apprehend it only at its comparatively elementary levels.”<sup>32</sup>

The openness of the order implies two important things: first, the universe is not imprisoned within a pointless circularity of inescapable necessities; second, the final truth of the universe lies outside its own reality. Torrance argues that, although the universe has a kind of necessity in the sense that it excludes any type of order other

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 217.

Torrance’s idea is inspired by his sympathetic study of the Greek fathers and Nicene theology. As Colyer helpfully notes from Torrance’s *Trinitarian Faith*, 104, “Torrance sees the Nicene theologians working this out in light of the incarnation, for the incarnation (and the resurrection) implies that the created order of the universe with its spatio-temporal structures is *open* to God’s recreative and reordering activities in Jesus Christ in space and time.” “This means that while the incarnation is a new event in space and time and in the life of God, Torrance does not view it as a breach of natural law.” See *How to Read T. F. Torrance* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 171-172, and the footnote 81 on 172.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 20.



than the existing one, the final explanation of this necessity cannot be gained from the study of it, namely, from natural science. Rather, the explanation opens our conceptual system to what transcends this creaturely universe and carries us up to its ultimate ground in the Creator.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the explanation of the universe is not contained within created phenomena such as “space and time” or “cause and effect” that seem absolute for it, but is free from them and anchored in the infinite freedom of God who can relate to what He has made creatively according to His immeasurable rationality. This idea, as Colyer notes, “shatters necessitarian and deterministic notions of the universe and human life...whether it be the tyranny of fate, inexorable cyclical processes, or the modern determinism of the materialist cause-and-effect universe.”<sup>34</sup> It leads a new look to the relationship between the Creator God and the created world including humankind.

### **5.1.3 The God-world Relationship**

We mentioned at the beginning that the notion of contingency implies an interlocking of creation’s dependence on God and its independence of God. Torrance employs this in his in-depth examination of the God-world relationship in creation. Among his

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 29, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 172. Refer to Torrance’s *Trinitarian Faith*, 104, and *Ground and Grammar*, 58. This idea crucially directs Torrance to understand the relationship between theology and science. For him, the relationship between theology and science is finally illuminated by the relationship between God and the world. Torrance’s criticism of the necessitarian and deterministic notions is closely associated with his understanding of space and time which we will observe in a later section.

arguments based upon this relational emphasis, there are two points especially worthy of our attention. These are the *freedom* of creation and the *unity* of creation with God.

### 5.1.3.1 The Freedom of Creation

Torrance argues for the freedom of creation within its contingent ordering. He points out that, “Just as there is an order in the universe transcendentally grounded in God, so there is a freedom in the universe transcendentally grounded in the freedom of God.”<sup>35</sup> This freedom is “derived from” yet “not as an extension of” God’s own freedom.<sup>36</sup> It bears a contingent and constrained character.<sup>37</sup> He claims that the universe enjoys a *limited* but *real* freedom of its own. On the one hand, the freedom is not unlimited because created rationality is not self-sufficient. He explains, “[An] absolute freedom in contingency would not be freedom but an irrational arbitrariness”; nevertheless, a limited freedom is the freedom proper to the contingent creation “for it is inseparably bound up with its contingent rationality.”<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, such a freedom is not an illusory freedom because it is grounded in the true and unlimited freedom of God. He indicates that “the freedom of the creation must mirror the freedom of God, and be unlimited and inexhaustible in its own way and on its own creaturely level.”<sup>39</sup> As long as the universe exists under God’s free interaction with it, it must have a true freedom to reflect God’s infinity and inexhaustibility.

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 21

<sup>37</sup> This echoes again, as Colyer notes, “the elusive character of the independence of creation, which is nevertheless dependent on God in and for its liberty.” See *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology*, 173.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Torrance F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 107.

### 5.1.3.2. The Unity of God with the World

In recognizing God's constant sustaining of the universe, Torrance perceives the unity between the Creator and the creation. According to the Jewish concept of God, there is only one God who alone is the source of all "so that if he were to withdraw his creative and upholding presence from the creation it would lapse back into chaos and sheer nothingness."<sup>40</sup> The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* has its roots in the Old Testament. It indicates not merely the absolute beginning of creation out of nothing but also "the continuity, stability, and uniformity of the natural world as grounded beyond itself in the constancy, faithfulness and reliability of God its Creator and Preserver."<sup>41</sup> That is to say, the world is shaped by its *constant unity* with God. In this unity the world remains at every moment dependent upon God, while God Himself remains inseparable from the world. This unity enables the universe to be stable, and it is held up by nothing other than God's faithfulness.

Once again, there is an interlocking of necessity and liberty in this unity. In one sense, the unity is necessary for both the world and God. Torrance points out that the world as the creation *of God* always finds its existence without separation from God. The truth of the world includes *God's constant interacting with the world*. However, this unity by no means violates the absolute liberty of God. It is because the "interaction rests upon the free ground of God's own transcendent being and

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 32.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 33.

rationality,” namely, the Word.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the unity is far from being an external constraint upon God as if He were at the disposal of necessities other than those of His freedom and love. Torrance notes that we hardly discern the unity between God and the world simply through a scientific examination of nature. This is because the unity demands that the world be in conformity with God’s Word but not the other way round. Apart from the revealed Word, natural science will tend to posit a dualist characterization of the God-world nexus as opposed to relational unity in difference.

### **5.1.3.3 The Medium of Space and Time**

Torrance’s perception of our contingent freedom and the God-world unity shows his opposition to determinism, deism, dualism and naturalism, all of which fail to register this unity in difference. Here we have to mention his particular understanding of space and time.<sup>43</sup>

Torrance finds that familiar ways of thinking about God have been distorted by faulty understandings of space and time in ancient physics and philosophy. He writes,

The theological lesson to be learned here is that deism and determinism go together. From the point of view of natural science, what is at stake is the radical dualism between absolute time and space identified with the containing life and presence of God and relative, apparent time and space of this world,

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Space and time* is an important concept in Torrance’s theology. It noticeably appears in his doctrine of creation and affects his teachings of other doctrinal topics, for instance, the incarnation, resurrection, natural and theological science. His arguments on space and time are seen in many of his works, such as *The Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), *Theological Science: Based on the Hewett Lectures for 1959*, Hewett lectures, 1959 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1969), *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1976), and *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965).

together with the masterful container notion of time and space with which all this is construed.<sup>44</sup>

This thought presupposes “a necessary and timeless relation between the world and God” and “a radical dualism between the intelligible and the sensible, or form and matter.”<sup>45</sup>

In addition, Torrance finds that contemporary philosophy also exercises a baleful influence in this regard. For example, Kantian notion of space and time as “*a priori* forms of intuition” transfers “absolute space and time from the mind of God to the mind of the human knower”.<sup>46</sup> Owing to these improper presuppositions about space and time, classical dualism and determinism become generalized and prevalent in modern thought.

However, in Torrance’s eyes, these presuppositions are neither justified nor in accordance with early Christian theology. He points out,

Early Christian theology sought to give an account of contingent rationality in terms of space and time which are the bearers of all rational order within the universe, but which were brought into being out of nothing along with the universe as features of its contingent processes or relational patterns of its natural operations.<sup>47</sup>

This implies that the space and time system is not an outside container which transcends contingency; rather, it is an intrinsic feature of the contingent order.

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 30.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 16.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 38.

Torrance insists that space and time have to be “an inescapable ingredient in the subject-matter of science in our attempts to grasp the vectorial character of process and change within the moving system of the universe, for that raises with us questions of ultimate origins and ultimate ends.”<sup>48</sup>

Early Christian theology enables Torrance to see space and time as aspects rather than containers of the created world. He gladly finds that this angle is confirmed by Einsteinian physics. For, according to his understanding of Einstein’s development on the dynamic field of space-time, “time itself enters with space into the structure of the field” and hence radically undermines the classical notion of matter.<sup>49</sup> The reconstruction relativizes time and causality and “deepens the concept of order in fundamental relationships”.<sup>50</sup> From this, Torrance perceives “a finite but unbounded universe with open, dynamic structures grounded in a depth of objectivity and intelligibility which commands and transcends our comprehension.”<sup>51</sup>

With the evidence of modern science, Torrance claims that we must think of space and time as “relations intrinsic to the on-going contingent processes of the

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 14. Torrance indicates, that although “this did not resolve away entirely the duality of particle and field”, it “did eliminate the damaging dualism inherent in Newtonian physics” by “replacing its rigid absolutes...with a more profoundly objective, unitary dynamic relatedness inherent in the structure of the universe...which cannot be construed in terms of a closed axiomatic framework.” For this reason, Torrance regards Einstein’s development of the dynamic field of space-time as the “most significant move away from determinism”. (See 13-14)

<sup>50</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 14.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 11.

universe” instead of unvarying containers.<sup>52</sup> The space-time concept itself introduces a continuous, dynamic, reciprocal relation between explicit occurrence and implicit power. This relational interpretation of space and time brings a revolutionary view of the world. He indicates,

*Everything changes...when space is no longer regarded as empty but filled with matter and energy, and when time enters effectively into the equation as an inalienable ingredient in the intervening relations between particles or events affecting their configuration...so that particles or events are to be regarded as *spatially* and *temporally extended* and not as simply contained in space and time.*<sup>53</sup>

It is in this sense that space and time become the medium of the God-world relation.

For him, such a perception of space and time coheres with the perception of God’s constantly sustaining; but more importantly, it helps us to understand the incarnation event better. Since space and time mark the intrinsic openness and changing of the universe in which “all absolutes fall away”<sup>54</sup>, we should behold the incarnation as the ultimate proof and demonstration of the openness of the universe to God. Furthermore, we should also behold the incarnation as an event spatially and temporally extended in history. In other words, it is true and effective not merely there and then, but also here and now.

#### **5.1.3.4 The Interrelation of Communication and Reflection**

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 12.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 12-13, italics added.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 12.

Torrance claims that “the universe is characterized throughout not by a static but by a dynamic stability.”<sup>55</sup> In comprehension of his thoughts above, we may see that this dynamic stability necessarily associates with the interrelation between God and the universe. In regard to the interrelation, Torrance perceives the double dynamics from both sides of God and the world.

From the side of God, there is a constant communication of the sufficient reason to uphold contingent orderliness. Torrance points out that God sustains the not-self-sufficient world with His own rationality; natural laws are subject not to any absolute logic but to the sufficient reason which God communicates to the world in space and time. Therefore, “in the dynamic space-time continuum, as indeed in all motion, we operate with the principle of sufficient reason and not with the principle of non-contradiction which is concerned with necessary relations.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, there is no static and logically compelling relation between God and the world.<sup>57</sup>

From the side of the world, there is a continuous reflection of God’s freedom and intelligibility in the contingent order. Torrance indicates,

This has to do with the astonishing flexibility and multivariability of the universe arising out of the freedom which God has conferred upon it in his creation. Far from being incompatible with the transcendent freedom of God it is creatively and continuously sustained by him as a creaturely reflection of his

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 38.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 18.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 34. For Torrance, this is particularly important for understanding God’s relation to the world realized in the incarnation and resurrection. That is to say, unless we discern the sufficient reason behind natural laws, we could not perceive the incarnation and resurrection as a *reality*. This resonates with Barth’s notion of creation as benefit.



own. This correlation of the freedom of the universe with the unlimited freedom of the Creator enters into the very core of contingent intelligibility and the kind of spontaneous order that it yields in nature, which we are unable to anticipate by any kind of *a priori* method operating with logico-causal continuities.<sup>58</sup>

Here we see that the relational dynamics not only come from God but also point back to God. God confers and sustains in order to *be reflected*. This discloses the deeper level of the unity between God and the world. That is to say, God not just upholds the world with sufficient reason; He demands the response from the world by the same reason, too. It is this reflection that dynamically illustrates how the God-world relation is a perfect unitary one.

On the subject of this reflective relation, we have to say a bit more. Torrance claims that, “the reason for the creation is theologically traced back to the free, ungrudging will of God’s love to create a reality other than himself which he correlates so closely with himself that *it is made to reflect and shadow forth on its contingent level his own inner rationality and order.*”<sup>59</sup> So God’s creation includes a *purpose* that God has for what He creates. The purpose is embedded within the creation, actively directing the proper mode of contingent existence, and constituting a necessary part of the unitary relation between God and the creation. The ultimate rationality of creation hence becomes a two-fold affair: the self-giving love from God to the world and the purposive reflection from the world to God. Together these comprise the eternal will of God to bring the world into being. This enriched

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 39.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 35, italics added.

understanding is important, for it develops the God-world relationship from a sufficient-contingent one into a loving-reflecting one. Hence the world must respond to God even as it exists contingently in dependence upon God. In Torrance's eyes, this relational understanding conforms to biblical teaching.

The biblical tradition preferred to speak of it in terms of the creative address of God's Word which summons the processes of the contingent world into orderly and harmonious antiphonal response. Thus there is generated throughout the universe under the creative power of God's Word a creaturely correspondence, a contingent language, answering obediently to the voice of the Creator.<sup>60</sup>

#### **5.1.4 The Human-world Relationship**

Finally, we must mention the human-world relationship in Torrance's doctrine of creation. Its major theme is humanity's priestly and redemptive role in the world. Although Torrance does not develop this in many places, this notion still guides us into a deeper layer of reflection on God's relation to creation. It also helps us to perceive a precious feature of Torrance's anthropology, i.e. a horizontal and creation-contextualized understanding of humanity, which he does not often address.

##### **5.1.4.1. The Priesthood of Creation**

Torrance regards humankind as priests of creation. He writes,

From the perspective of theology man is clearly made the focal point in the interrelations between God and the universe. He is given a special place within the creation with a ruling and a priestly function to perform toward the rest of created reality. All lines of rationality and order, of purpose and fulfillment in

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 37-38.

the creation converge on him as *man of God* and *man of science* and depend on his destiny.<sup>61</sup>

In Torrance's view, God and the natural world interrelate *through* human beings. To be the focal point is to be the middle link at the intermediary place. This place of humankind "has a particular importance for the whole multi-levelled structure" because "the universe as a whole is formed in such a way that man constitutes that intelligent ingredient in it through whose heuristic inquiry and creative activity the universe knows and unfolds itself in developing rational order and expression."<sup>62</sup> Corresponding to the hierarchy and unitary nature of the rational relation between God and His creation, their priestly function suggests that human beings, as the crown of the intelligent creation, mediate the "higher" level (i.e. the sufficient reason of God) with the "lower" level (i.e. the contingent order of the world). That is why Torrance uses the phrase "as man of God and man of science" to summarize our priesthood.<sup>63</sup>

Torrance highly values the rational and scientific mediation of humankind for the creation. He indicates, "Without him [i.e. humankind] the various levels of contingent reality in the universe would lapse back into meaninglessness and pointlessness, but with and through him the meaning and the purpose of the universe

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 129, italics added.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 129-130. Cf. Eric G. Flett's "Priests of Creation, Mediators of Order: the human person as a cultural being in Thomas F. Torrance's theological anthropology", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 58, 2005, 161-183.

<sup>63</sup> He also uses "man of faith" instead of "man of God" to mean the same. See *Divine and Contingent Order*, 130.

are disclosed and effectuated.”<sup>64</sup> This fact is told from another side as “the sad story of ecological chaos” caused by fallen humankind.<sup>65</sup> Torrance emphasizes that “when man himself is seized of evil, and his interaction with the Creator is damaged and disordered, his interaction with nature becomes damaged and disordered as well.”<sup>66</sup> In this sense, human beings sin against the integrity of the creation as they fail to mediate between the “higher” and “lower” levels properly.

#### **5.1.4.2. The Redemption of Creation**

Torrance points out that since evil irrupted into the creation and introduced disorder, the priestly role of humankind “must take on a redemptive form”, i.e. “to save the natural order through remedial and integrative activity”.<sup>67</sup> This is the supposed relationship of us to the world now. However, we need to be saved from our own disordered situation firstly, if we are to save nature. “[T]he deliverance of the natural order from subjection to futility and corruption ultimately depends on the destiny of man in his relation to God.”<sup>68</sup> That is to say, the redemption of creation must rely on the salvation of humanity in Christ. By this Torrance turns the focus on the significant event of incarnation.

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 130.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 130.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 130. For Torrance, the question of “evil” in the theological and scientific thought is the question of “disorder”, i.e. the “irrational elements” that disturb order in the universe. See *Divine and Contingent Order*, 113 ff.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 130.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 133-134. He believes this is what Paul said of all creation in describing the agony of travail waiting for God to restore man to sonship. He also discerns here the relevance of the Christian message for both natural science and theology.

In a later section, we will deal with Torrance's teachings on the significance of incarnation for creation. Here, nevertheless, we take an initial step to see how he views the incarnation of Christ associated with the human-world relationship and humanity's redemptive function in creation. Torrance asserts,

The fact that God has taken the way of becoming man in allying himself with contingent existence and thereby effecting the redemption of the creation from within its ontological foundations, *immensely reinforces the unique place of man in the universe*. And in that it is redeemed man who is established at the head of the whole system of inter-level interaction throughout the created order, man's priestly function in the universe now takes on the pattern of a redemptive mission to nature.<sup>69</sup>

For Torrance, God's taking a *human* form makes the unique position of humankind ever clear and assured. Since Christ ontologically conquers sin and disorder within humanity, he restores humanity's proper interaction with both God and the world. The proper mediation of humankind between the "higher" and "lower" levels becomes possible again. Therefore the incarnation is a movement that reconciles not only the God-human relationship but also the human-world relationship. In Christ humankind re-establishes a harmony with the rest of the creaturely world. Without this harmony, human beings can do nothing to save the natural world from disorder through their scientific involvement in it.

For this reason, Torrance considers God's salvation of humanity through the incarnation as something directly taking place "at the very heart of the creation" and

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 138, italics added.

ultimately answering “the question of evil in the creation”.<sup>70</sup> In other words, it is through re-ordering our existence and assuring our destiny in Christ that God calls us to fulfill the redemptive mission for the whole creation through our rational mediation in it. Torrance sums up humanity’s redemptive vocation like this:

It is now the role of man in union with Christ to serve the purpose of God’s love in the ongoing actualization of that redemption, sanctification and renewal within the universe...Thus man has been called to be a kind of midwife to creation, in assisting nature out of its divinely given abundance constantly to give birth to new forms of life and richer patterns of order. Indeed, as the covenant-partner of Jesus Christ man may be regarded as the priest of creation, through whose service...the marvelous rationality, symmetry, harmony and beauty of God’s creation are being brought to light and given expression in such a way that the whole universe is found to be a glorious hymn to the Creator.<sup>71</sup>

## **5.2 A Christocentric Understanding of Creation**

The significance of the incarnation for creation is an important topic for Torrance. It carries his quintessentially Christocentric theology into the doctrine of creation. We will first approach this from his critique of natural theology.

### **5.2.1 The Paradox of Natural Theology**

In discussing how we could perceive the profound truth of the contingent creation in relation to God, Torrance insists upon the inadequacy of natural theology. He supports

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 134, 137.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition”, in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to Professor James B. Torrance* (ed. Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell, Allison Park: Pickwick, 1989), 387.

this conviction through exposing the paradox of natural science: “The basic problem that faces us in the relations between theological science and natural science has to do with a deep paradox in the heart of natural science itself.”<sup>72</sup>

On the one hand, Torrance acknowledges that the scientific understanding of the world is necessary. This is because natural laws confirm the objectivity of the contingent order which is conferred by God. God affirms them as real even for Himself in His actual relation to the universe, and He obliges us to respect them as upheld by His divine sanction. “[W]e cannot think of his interaction with the universe as in any way interfering with its laws or thereby introducing disorder into what he has made, but rather the reverse, as reinforcing its contingent rationality and giving constancy to its immanent order.”<sup>73</sup>

Yet, on the other hand, Torrance insists that natural science is inadequate to uncover the real origin of the universe in the first place. This is because natural laws only apply to “those observable processes of a nature that is already in being” but not to “those creative processes by which what is nature came into being”.<sup>74</sup>

In the prosecution of our scientific inquiries we can only move along the intelligible relations and their sequences latent in the world until we reach the boundaries where they break off, and where we find it scientifically

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 26.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 23. In Torrance’s eyes, this is true even for understanding the incarnation. “The incarnation made it clear that the physical world, far from being alien or foreign to God, was affirmed by God as real even for himself.” (33) That is to say, the incarnation of God into this world announces God’s confirmation to the contingent reality of this world, despite the fact that the event does not fit natural laws.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 8.

illegitimate to extend intramundane connections and possibilities beyond our actual world.<sup>75</sup>

That is to say, the primary secret of creation ultimately rests beyond the created world in the Creator God. To this extent, a scientific knowledge of creation fundamentally needs the revelation from God.

Further to the objective-yet-inadequate status of natural science, Torrance points to a similarly paradoxical feature of natural theology. He appeals to the dual conviction of Reformed theology that, “nothing can be established about contingency except through divine revelation (*nihil constat de contingentia nisi ex revelatione*), and, divine creation requires us to investigate the contingent world out of its own natural processes alone; without including God in the given (*acsi deus non daretur*).”<sup>76</sup> For this reason, Torrance asserts that natural theology based on natural science cannot stand by itself to disclose the fundamental truth of the contingent creation. We need the divine revelation of the Word incarnate in Christ to gain an understanding of creation.

### **5.2.2 The Ultimate Rationality of the Word Incarnate**

For Torrance, the innermost secret of creation is the reason and motivation that explain *why God creates*. He indicates, “What we cannot understand is that God who has no need of the world should have reason to create such a rational world, yet it is that reason hidden deep in God that ultimately lies behind all the reasonableness of the

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 27.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 26.



created order.”<sup>77</sup> The traditional answer to the question “had pointed to the ungrudging goodness of God who instead of keeping his goodness to himself framed the world in order that it might reflect his own goodness and order.”<sup>78</sup> Torrance explains that, since God was free not to create, the act of creation should be understood as an act of pure grace dependent upon God’s beneficent will. Abiding with his understanding of God that “God can never be anything but love or anything but the Father,”<sup>79</sup> Torrance believes that the motivation behind God’s creative act must be in accord with His fatherhood and have taken place in His out-flowing love. God’s fatherly love is the substance of God’s beneficent will for the creation. Hence, God the Father created the world in order to pour out His fatherly love onto the world so that it can share the loving communion of His own. Torrance draws upon the ancient Church fathers in stating,

In himself, as Hilary used to say, God is not ‘solitary’, for as Father, Son and Holy Spirit he is an eternal communion of love and personal being in himself. Earlier Irenaeus had argued that although God is wholly self-sufficient in the inner fellowship of his being, God does not will to exist for himself alone, but has freely and spontaneously brought a world into existence out of non-existence to which he has given an integrity of its own and in which he has

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 35.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 91. Torrance points out that this is a teaching of Plato and is given attention by Irenaeus. He finds it quite agreeing with Christian understanding of creation. As he indicates two pages after, “that is indeed what we find again and again in the works of the Nicene and post-Nicene theologians, as in the reference of Gregory Thaumaturgus to ‘the sacred economy of the universe’. It was Irenaeus particularly who spelled out the biblical teaching about the universe as the good creation of God who unceasingly maintains and harmoniously disposes it in covenanted relations with himself, whereby it reflects his glory and constitutes the sphere of his loving purpose for mankind.” (See *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp.93-94 and the footnotes 77, 78.)

<sup>79</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 77.

planted rational creaturely beings upon whom he may *bestow his bounty* and with whom he may *share his divine communion of love* and personal being.<sup>80</sup>

However, this belief cannot be proved by science. In other words, we cannot get to know the ultimate rationality of creation through studying the created world itself. Torrance insists that the ultimate rationality of creation is yet to be thoroughly perceived until the Word is incarnated in the world.

Tracing the origin of creation, Torrance stresses that the universe was brought into being only through the Word. The concept of *ex nihilo* excludes any other agent from creation. The Word alone is “the divine agent of creation”.<sup>81</sup> But he does not think of the Word in a pure transcendent meaning apart from the incarnation. For him, the Word becomes knowable only through Jesus Christ, therefore it is the *Word centered in Christ* that can provide a proper knowledge of creation.

Torrance argues that the incarnate Word distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, and gives a more profound understanding of the contingent creation. Through relating creation to the incarnation of God’s Word in Jesus Christ, Christian theology radicalizes the notion of contingency and grants reality to the notion of contingent intelligibility. It enables us to see that the universe is endowed with not only “an astonishing constancy and reliability” but also a kind of “spontaneity and freedom which will always take us by surprise.”<sup>82</sup> For Torrance, “this is what we

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 90-91, italics added.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 24.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 108.

should expect of a creation called into being and sustained by the sovereign Creator revealed in Jesus Christ, for in Jesus Christ we discern this same astonishing combination of freedom and constancy, of spontaneity and reliability, of unpredictability [i.e. contingency] and order.”<sup>83</sup>

### 5.2.3 The Significance of the Incarnation

Torrance claims that the event in which the *Creator became a creature* “forced theology to probe more deeply into the traditional concept of creation out of nothing and the nature of created existence.”<sup>84</sup> The incarnation is “the intersecting vertical dimension which gives the horizontal coordinates of the universe the integrative factor providing them with consistent and ultimate meaning, in a way which a merely deistic asymptotic relation between God and the universe could never do.”<sup>85</sup> It proves that the lower level of the created world is “open at its own ‘boundary conditions’” to the higher level of the Creator God.<sup>86</sup> The mystery of Christ is about a boundary-breaking secret. He argues,

Thus there are, it would seem, sets of circumstances or events in the life of Jesus, as he is presented in the Gospels, which do not seem to make sense to us when we regard them merely on the level of observable phenomena, for they conflict with the orderly way we are accustomed to interpret phenomena, but when we consider them in correlation with additional factors introduced from a higher level, they are discerned to present a profoundly intelligible pattern compelling the assent of our minds. That happens only in the framework

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<sup>83</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 173.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 97.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 24-25.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 24.

created by the bearing of the incarnation upon the creation which provides the Gospel with its infinite dimension of depth grounded in the transcendent rationality of God.<sup>87</sup>

How, then, does the incarnation make us perceive Creation in greater depth? Torrance answers this by illustrating the significance of the incarnation for the recreating of the world in a way that fulfils the ultimate rationality of creation.

Torrance contends that the incarnation is a re-creative event. After the Fall, the orderly universe has become *disordered* under all kinds of threats including a complete destruction into nothingness (i.e. the annihilation of creation). In order to restore the order, God directly entered into the disordered condition of the world to correct it from within its own structure. Through this re-creative act, God's ultimate love for creation becomes consummated. He writes,

Through astonishing self-communication to the creature he [i.e. God] has established in the incarnation a *supreme axis*, as it were, for *direct interaction* with the creation within its contingent existence and structure, which is at the same time the *pledge of his eternal faithfulness* that he will never let go what he has made, allowing it to decay and crumble away into nothingness, but will uphold and redeem it and consummate through it the purpose of his *rational love*.<sup>88</sup>

Several things implied here merit further interpretation.

First, the incarnation restores the created order through establishing a *direct interaction* of God with the world. Torrance believes that the Creator-creature interaction before the incarnation is *indirect* due to the substantial otherness of God

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<sup>87</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 25.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 23, italics added.

from what He created. The incarnation, however, establishes a new type of interaction, that is, God breaks the Creator-creature boundary and intervenes in the world in a direct manner.<sup>89</sup> Although this direct interaction is miraculous for the world, it is neither the suspending nor abrogating of the contingent order but rather “the re-creating and deepening of that order” in the face of all that threatens to break it down.<sup>90</sup> Therefore it is the “supreme axis” above any indirect ones.<sup>91</sup>

Second, the incarnation preserves the contingent creation with an eternal *pledge of God’s embodiment* in the world. As Colyer notes, the incarnation in Torrance’s theology discloses “a further point about the contingent creation”, i.e. the creation is in such “a precarious state” that “God has to step in and save it by uniting creation with himself in atoning reconciliation.”<sup>92</sup> Torrance believes that the creation out of nothing is only contingent and not stable *per se*. Human corruption worsens the situation and entangles the whole contingent being under a fatal destruction. In order to preserve creation from decaying back into nothingness, God embodied Himself into creation to sustain its existence. Therefore, the personal embodiment of God seals a divine and eternal pledge that the Creator will never let the creation go. For this reason

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<sup>89</sup> For Torrance, this direct manner indicates the *hypostatic union* in Christ, as we have examined in the previous chapter on his Christology. In *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, Torrance offers a similar argument about the direct interaction versus the indirect interaction. Please refer to *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, 84 and the section 2.3.5 of the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 24.

<sup>91</sup> Here we need to be reminded of his claim with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity – the Father-Son relation outstands above all other relations to define God. For Torrance, the direct interaction established in Christ must be the supreme axis to define God’s relation with the world, *because Christ is the Son of the Father*. In other words, the supremacy of the direct interaction is finally due to the supremacy of the Father-Son relation.

<sup>92</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: understanding his Trinitarian and scientific theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 169-170.

Torrance emphasizes that the person of Jesus Christ *is* the divine pledge and the resurrection of Christ assures us of God's absolute power "over all being and non-being"<sup>93</sup> in particular. It is in the risen Christ that we find a firm security for the contingent creation.

Third and the most important, the incarnation consummates the purpose of God's *rational love* for creation. Torrance interprets this idea mainly from the perspective of revelation, i.e. the incarnation completes the revelation of God's loving rationality for creation.<sup>94</sup> Torrance claims that the ultimate rationality of creation is God's fatherly love. This claim is only convincing if explained only by the fact that God has no need of the universe but nevertheless brought it into being. God indeed created freely and almightily in the beginning. However, the love behind the freedom and almightiness had not been manifested in its fullest measure *until* the incarnation in which God condescended to redeem what He created with His own *passion*. Torrance writes, "It was the manifestation of that divine love in Jesus Christ, the Logos, *Mind or Reason of God made flesh*, which made theologians realize that the universe has a transcendent reason for its being, grounded beyond itself in the love of the Father and

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 97.

<sup>94</sup> Logically, *consummating the purpose* is not identical with *completing the revelation of the purpose*, though these are closely related as ontic and epistemic aspects of the one reality. Torrance does not clearly distinguish them but holds them together in much of his argument. While we should not divide the two issues to the point of separation, we should notice this point: The former (i.e. consummating the purpose) may imply a progress of development from the unaccomplished stage to accomplishment, namely, the purpose of creation is only accomplished with the incarnation. The latter (i.e. completing the revelation of the purpose), however, may only imply a progress of manifestation, namely, the purpose of creation, which is fulfilled but hidden in the beginning, becoming fully discovered after the incarnation. This issue will be explored in more detail below.

the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>95</sup> Christ shows us that God’s almightiness “conflicts with the ideas of limitless arbitrary power” according to our worldly experiences, but “is of an altogether different kind”, i.e. of passionate love.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, unless we understand what God’s freedom and sovereignty really are in the light of what God has done in Jesus Christ, we cannot fully claim the great love hidden in God’s free and almighty act of creation.

It is not difficult to see that Torrance’s emphasis falls upon the significance of the incarnation for *creation’s subsistence* as well as *our recognition* of it. On the one hand, the incarnation rescued the creation by embodying the eternal Word within the contingent order of the cosmos. The instability of creation hence becomes secured from destruction by God’s direct upholding of it from within the contingent order. On the other hand, the incarnation enables us to fully recognize creation as a loving project of God. We know God’s creative power as love only through the passion of Christ. It is the passion manifested by the incarnate God that makes us see the loving substance of God’s sovereign Word. Thereby we can claim the same sovereignty of love in God’s original creative action.

#### **5.2.4 The Unity of Creation and Salvation in the New Creation**

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 93, italics added. In this statement, Torrance means that the universe is grounded in God’s love which is not merely a Creator’s love for what He created but fundamentally a Trinitarian love within the divine Trinity. Please refer to last chapter. The connection and integrity of these will be addressed further in the Conclusion.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 82.

Through unfolding the significance of the incarnation for creation, Torrance seals the unity of creation and salvation within the incarnate Word. He believes that this fact enables Christian theology to affirm “a single rational order [which] pervades all created existence contingent upon the transcendent rationality of God,”<sup>97</sup> for all creation has its beginning and its new beginning in a *single* rational source, i.e. the Word of God. The singularity of the Word-based rationality marks the unity of creation and salvation.

But we should remember that Torrance focuses on the Christocentric Word, i.e. the incarnate Word, rather than the abstract Word apart from incarnation. Therefore the Word-based creation must be a Christ-centred one.<sup>98</sup> So we must understand the original creation out of nothing *through Christ’s incarnation of the divine Word within created reality*. In this sense, creation cannot stand independently from salvation but has to be united with(in) it.

Therefore the unity of creation and salvation indicates the submission of creation to the norm of salvation, and not the other way round. For Torrance, this is the best way to reflect the singularity of rationality in the world as well as in God. That is to say: in the first place, as the intelligible origin of the world is realized through the subject of the incarnation, i.e. the divine Word or Son, we find a pervasive,

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<sup>97</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 103.

<sup>98</sup> In Torrance’s eyes, the Word-centered doctrine of creation is particularly for New Testament teaching and Nicene theology. He claims, “Of paramount importance, of course, for Athanasius and all the Nicene theologians were the first chapters of St John’s Gospel and of the Epistles to the Colossians and the Hebrews, in which a Christ-centred and Word-centred doctrine of creation was presented.” (*The Trinitarian Faith*, 77.)



multi-variable, unitary order or intelligibility in the universe in both the original creation and its re-creation through Christ's salvation. Meanwhile, as the event of salvation discloses God's heart toward the world, we perceive an identical reason and coherent purpose of God in both His creative and redemptive acts. Furthermore, as God is incarnated into the creaturely world, we realize (with surprise) the embodiment of creative intelligibility (i.e. the Word) in the world. Thus we see the unity of the two at the deepest level. These three elements comprise the main argument of Torrance's opposition against all forms of pluralism and polymorphism as well as against any dualism between God and the world. The unitary relation is finally anchored in Christ, the incarnate Word, rather than in creation itself.

The unity of creation with salvation centered in Christ consequently implies the superiority of the new creation achieved through Christ. In this context, Torrance asserts that Christ is the head of the new creation for "all creation with which God allied himself so inextricably in the incarnation has been set on the entirely new basis of his saving grace."<sup>99</sup> In this saving grace, Christ "opens the way [for the creation] through his resurrection into a new state of affairs far transcending the old, in which evil and disorder will be finally eliminated and God's purpose of love for his creation will be perfectly fulfilled."<sup>100</sup> Such a new state brings a new freedom that the contingent creation could have never enjoyed before. That is an *absolute freedom of being* beyond any threat of instability and destruction. In other words, the new creation, though still contingent, becomes ever stable and indestructible. Undoubtedly, all the

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<sup>99</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 138.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 137.

newness must stand upon the new relational ground – the Creator and creature have *become one* in Christ so that “the ontological relation between the contingent universe and the Creator is securely anchored in God himself.”<sup>101</sup> Torrance asserts that this pattern definitely differs from the original pattern, for the incarnation is something even new for God – it is not an essential part of the eternal life of the Trinity.<sup>102</sup>

## **5.3 Critique – Pursuing the Integration of Different Doctrinal Perspectives**

### **5.3.1 Construction Contribution**

With respect to Torrance’s interpretation of creation, we find there some inspiring insights and connections. These contribute significantly to theology in general and to theological anthropology more specifically.

#### **5.3.1.1 The Dialectical Relation of Creation**

Torrance’s principal contribution is to stress the dialectical character of contingency. Torrance unfolds the contingency of creation as the interlocking of the dependence and independence of the world in relation with God. This dialectical link provides the key to understanding everything within and of the world as related to but distinguished from God, in particular, the freedom and rationality of the world. According to this

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 139.

<sup>102</sup> Torrance explains that “In the incarnation God was free to do something new even for himself, *for he was not eternally incarnate*, and free to move outside to himself.” (*Divine and Contingent Order*, 6, italics added.)

insight, we find the right way to view the God-world relationship by avoiding the dualism of deistic construction and the monism of pantheism. The dialectical unitary relation secures the God-world relationship in a manner that does justice to both divine transcendence and immanence.

This is highly significant for theological anthropology. A critical issue for modern theology battling against the anthropocentric tendency of post-Enlightenment approaches is whether we should regard God and humankind both as subject or prioritize God alone as the subject.<sup>103</sup> In other words, should we allow a theocentric theology to grant to humanity the position of subject, with the result that human activity is prioritized. Brunner and Barth offered different responses that seem incompatible with one another. Torrance, with his doctrine of contingency however, helps us to re-conceptualize this problem. Hence, if we agree that *creatio ex nihilo* includes humankind, we need to consider the God-human relation as being included in the God-world relation (although they are not exactly the same) and thus sharing the dialectical elements of dependence and independence. As a part of the contingent creation, humankind is *both dependent on and independent of* God. God is the sole absolute subject on whom everything is dependent, and yet humanity is given a relative independence by virtue of its created rationality. These two aspects interlock with each other. We have maintained them both, rather than set them in a binary either-or disjunction. This reflects the experience of faith, and is here explained by the doctrine of contingency. In this sense, Torrance makes a valuable contribution in

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<sup>103</sup> Please refer to section 2.1.2, particularly the foot note 20, of this thesis.

enabling us to place the subjective freedom and responsibility of humankind in a balanced perspective. This is also reflected in his soteriology with reference to the dual movement in Christ, as divine and human. On the one hand, we can underline God's initiative and prior action in Christ, and yet on the other hand we can make sense of the response of Christ as a human person to God the Father.

#### **5.3.1.2 The Dynamic Structure of Creation**

Another important gain in Torrance's account of creation lies in his stress on the dynamic structure of creation. Torrance helps us see from a rational and scientific perspective that the universe is a dynamic system open to changes which are neither wholly determined nor completely random. This enables us better to understand miracles (such as incarnation and resurrection) as new and undetermined actions of God which nevertheless can be recognized as expressions of divine wisdom and rationality, as opposed to freak and random events. With this help, we need not "demythologize" the miracles that the Bible testifies as historically true. In other words, theology does not need demythologization for the sake of its communication to a rational audience. Whether we believe the theological truth of the divine miracles which happened in history depends on whether we believe the scientific truth of the contingent order open to the sufficient rationality.

In addition, this dynamic structure is strengthened by the space and time structures of the creation. Torrance's new spatial-temporal view makes us see that everything in the world takes place within the expanding dynamics of space-time. It not only discloses creation as an on-going system but also uncovers God's on-going

preservation through the spatial-temporal medium. The constant existence of the world and the continuous sustaining of God can be understood more clearly from within this perspective. This is of significance for theological anthropology. Our salvation takes place through the vicarious humanity of Christ within the spatio-temporal structures of creation. The incarnation of Christ is not a static metaphysical event but one of dynamic relational significance for the whole created order.

### **5.3.1.3 The Reflective Purpose of Creation**

Although not original to Torrance, his linking of creation and salvation is particularly effective. The doctrine of the contingency starts from a basic conviction: God creates the world neither by necessity nor by accident; there must be a reason behind His creative act, and the world must be created in wisdom. Following the classical tradition of the church, Torrance sees the reason for creation (i.e. the ultimate rationality in Torrance's phrase) in the overflowing love of God. Torrance integrates divine wisdom and love by perceiving the purpose of God to reflect back the dynamic rationality and relationality of God's eternal life. So God lets His love outflow not because it is superfluous but because it is driven by His eternal wisdom within the life of the Godhead.

Torrance's teaching at this point echoes and supports his anthropology. As we have seen, Torrance asserts the *imago Dei* to be a dynamic reflection rather than a static possession. His theology of creation enables us to situate in wider context this anthropological claim. As a dynamic system established by God for a purpose, the entire universe is the matrix for our own particular relation to God. That is why

Torrance regards human beings as *priests* (not the opponents) of creation. This world of space-time is our home, and is not merely a temporary staging post. Here Torrance provides the scope for theological anthropology to examine our relationship with the world, although he himself does not explore it deeply. It at least allows theology to consider from a positive angle who we are “in the world” alongside our relationship of union with Christ. It is the incarnate Christ who assumes a created human nature and who enables us to fulfil our relation in and for the rest of creation. Thus the horizontal dimension of human life is not excluded; rather, it becomes a necessary element in the understanding of the *imago Dei*.

### **5.3.2 Criticisms of Christocentrism and Rationality**

Torrance’s doctrine of creation integrates theological and scientific approaches to creation. It enables us to understand our contingency in relation to the Word which became incarnate. But while we find many inspiring insights here, we must also pose some questions about his understanding of Christocentrism and our created rationality.

#### **5.3.2.1 Is the Word without Incarnation Sufficient for Creation?**

In relation to the ultimate ground of creation, Torrance stresses the *Christocentric* Word, i.e. the *incarnate* Word.<sup>104</sup> As we have observed, he underlines not only the

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<sup>104</sup> As he claims, “the incarnate Son or Logos, through whom all things were made and in whom they hold together, is the central and creative source of all order and rationality within the created universe.” (*Divine and Contingent Order*, 2.) The pronoun “whom” in this sentence is a bit ambiguous. It can indicate the Son/Logos or the incarnate Son/Logos. Torrance might not mean to claim that all things were made through the *incarnate* Son/Logos, but he shows a clear inclination to assert that all things hold together in the *incarnate* Son/Logos. For Torrance, being incarnate or not does matter for it marks the difference of the

revelatory significance but also the salvific significance of the incarnation. The incarnate Word not only reveals the ultimate rationality of creation but also establishes a new God-world relationship to save the creation from destruction. While the two aspects are both important, the latter particularly manifests the decisive effect of incarnation for the creation. Our first question also arises here: is the Word without incarnation *sufficient* for the existence of creation?

One of Torrance's arguments is that the universe, as being contingent by nature, just cannot avoid the threat of slipping back into nothingness. Human sin only worsens the precarious state.<sup>105</sup> Christ's cosmic salvation indicates that the whole universe finally needs the *incarnate* Word to secure its existence. Unless the eternal Word becomes embodied into contingent existence, this threat cannot be removed. In other words, whether or not we sin, the creation seems to be threatened by nothingness in any case. This is only resolved by Christ's incarnation. On account of this conviction, Torrance regards the incarnation as the "pledge of God's eternal faithfulness" and the

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*old* and the *new* relationship between God and the world. In this sense "the Son/Logos" (transcendent in eternity, or, in the beginning without incarnation) and "the incarnate Son/Logos" are not completely identical and equivalent concepts in Torrance's theology. Since he underlines the definitive significance of incarnation (i.e. the *new* God-world relationship formed by the incarnation) for the creation, we have reason to believe that in this statement of Torrance the pronoun "whom" indicates "the incarnate Son or Logos" more likely.

<sup>105</sup> Please refer to the content related to the footnotes 91-97. For Torrance, human's sin does cause disorder to nature, but there is no *necessary* cause-and-effect connection between the orderly or disorderly existence of the world and the evil of humankind. For example, he indicates, "It would also be true to say that in and through the profound interconnection of order and disorder in which man and nature share together, nature constantly reveals surprising new possibilities in spite of man, which can have a healing and rectifying effect on him, for after all it is much more in man himself than in nature that evil has lodged itself." (*Divine and Contingent Order*, 130-131)

“supreme axis for God’s direct interaction” with the creation; this alone guarantees the safety of creation from decaying into nothingness.<sup>106</sup>

Such an argument suggests a certain insufficiency of *the Word without the incarnation* for the preserving of the creation *ex nihilo*. That is to say, when God first brought the world into being out of nothing with His Word which had not become incarnate yet, something was still pending to “actualize” His providential will in creation and to guarantee the result of His creative act.<sup>107</sup> Before God became flesh, the world was spared from nothingness by God in a kind of semi-secured or half-provided way. The so-called sufficient rationality of God somehow was *yet to be truly sufficient* for preserving the created being and order until it became incarnate. This is probably the real implication of Torrance’s statement that the incarnation event “forced theology to probe more deeply into the traditional concept of creation out of nothing and the nature of created existence.”<sup>108</sup>

Here we find again that in Torrance’s theology Christocentrism is not merely an epistemological conviction but ultimately an ontological conviction.<sup>109</sup> The crux falls upon the event of incarnation which he regards as the all-decisive foundation not only for the salvation but also for the creation. Therefore our question actually concerns *what is* God’s original will in the act of *creatio ex nihilo*. In other words, it is

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<sup>106</sup> See again footnote 88.

<sup>107</sup> Torrance clearly states, “The incarnation is to be interpreted as the alliance of the Creator with his creation in *actualization of his will to make himself responsible for its preservation and salvation*.” (*Divine and Contingent Order*, 135, italics added.)

<sup>108</sup> See again footnote 84.

<sup>109</sup> We have mentioned this Christocentric character in Torrance’s doctrine of the Trinity in the previous chapter.



beyond the epistemological issue and points to the ontological issue about God and creation *per se*.<sup>110</sup> At the very least, there seems to be an *aporia* in Torrance's writing at this point. One might speak of the original act of creation as having the incarnation in view, and therefore of God's sustaining of the universe in a way that proleptically anticipates the incarnation. Alternatively, one might reflect upon the incarnation and resurrection as pronouncing decisively that what God created as good is always to be maintained and upheld by God's love. The incarnation thus guarantees for all eternity the reality of the creation from out of nothing.

#### **5.3.2.2 What Is the Role of Rationality in Our Reflection of God?**

What is the role of rationality for our reflection of God? Torrance's doctrine of creation highly values the rationality that God gives to what He created. He illustrates the dialectical character of contingency mainly through exposing the close relationship between the uncreated rationality of God and the created rationality of the world. He emphasizes that the latter is not only *grounded in* but also *reflects* the former. Humankind, as the culmination of the rational creation, has a mediatory position between the two rationalities in particular. Their scientific activity significantly matters for the reflection of God in creation. That is why the *imago Dei* has a general

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<sup>110</sup> We have no question about the epistemological dimension of Torrance Christocentrism, i.e. *how can we know* the ultimate rationality of God in His original creation.

significance for the whole universe and a particular one for the human being.<sup>111</sup> Rationality is given a central role in this picture.

However, we do not find much continuity of expression in this regard in Torrance's anthropology. The value of rationality disappears from his interpretation of humanity as the reflection of God. As we see in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Torrance finally abandons any identification of a rational element with the *imago Dei*.<sup>112</sup> There is neither connection between the scientific study of nature and the knowledge of God nor connection between faith in God's Word and the rational capacity of human beings. His high view of the rational bond between God and the world and humankind in some places becomes a very low view in other places. The role of rationality in the reflection of God finally disappears from view in his more detailed anthropological analysis.

This is principally explained by the radical effect of sin. But Torrance further explains that humanity should be defined not by its relation to the world but by its relation to God.<sup>113</sup> This principle is not wrong. Nevertheless, his teaching about humankind's position in creation interweaves these two relations. We cannot talk

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<sup>111</sup> In *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, the concept of the *imago Dei* has already been understood in a dynamic sense, i.e. the reflection of God, rather than the static sense, i.e. the portrait or likeness of God.

<sup>112</sup> That is what we have discussed in his Barthian interpretation of Calvin and his response to the Brunner-Barth controversy. In *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, he started with the rationality-related *imago Dei* in humanity (which Calvin and Brunner acknowledge), but finally abandoned it from the definition of the *imago Dei* (in conformity with Barth).

<sup>113</sup> Torrance asserts that "Man cannot be understood by his relation to the world. It is not from below man that man can be understood but from above man [i.e. God]." (*Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 23.) Also refer to section 2.2.2.3 of this thesis.

about our *imago*-relation to God without reference to our relation to the world in which we mediate the universal *imago Dei*. Torrance himself has pointed this out in his doctrine of creation:

We are concerned not just with relations between man and God but with *the relationship of man in the universe to God the Creator of the universe*, so that our understanding of the on-going universe itself cannot but enter into the coefficients of our theological statements, e.g. in their empirical correlates, not only when we are concerned specifically with creation and incarnation but also with *every aspect of a theological account of God's interaction with us in the world where time and space constitute the orderly medium for divine revelation* to man and human knowledge of God.<sup>114</sup>

This statement shows that Torrance is aware of the necessary context of creation for the God-human relationship. Such an awareness could have led him to a more rounded theological anthropology which examines humanity not exclusively in its vertical connection with God through the supernatural event of incarnation, but also in the horizontal connection with the world through our empirical life. This does not entail returning to an anthropocentric theology without a proper focus on God or a natural theology that is set apart from the revelation. As long as space and time are not static containers *but the dynamic relations* through which God interacts with us, to explore such the spatial-temporal creation is to explore a necessary part of the God-human relationship. It by no means violates the proper approach that he sets down for anthropology. Rather it coheres with his relational perspective for theology. Unfortunately, Torrance's insight into "the relationship of man in the universe to God the Creator" only sparks in his doctrine of creation; it does not shine out in his

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 1, italics added.

anthropology. This generates a gap between two doctrines in his theology. And this gap produces some discontinuity in his attitude to the role of rationality in the *imago Dei* (i.e. the reflection of God).

### **5.3.3 Potential Complement – in Comparison with Moltmann**

We cannot avoid the two questions raised above as long as we consider humankind as a part of creation. Torrance does not address this matter in sufficient detail. Here we might again seek some help from other theologians. Jürgen Moltmann is one of those whom we might turn to in this context. In his theology, Moltmann employs a perspective of the cosmic Trinity to interpret God's creative act and God's unitary relation with the world. It does not necessarily stand opposed to Torrance's teaching, but provides some further insights which might complement Torrance's Christocentric approach. In what follows, we shall take a brief glance at Moltmann's *God in Creation* and see how it may help with these two questions. Through such comparative observation, we can reach a deeper and more critical comprehension of Torrance's Christocentric theology with respect to human identity in relation to both God and the world.

#### **5.3.3.1 Moltmann's *God in Creation***

Moltmann names his *God In Creation* "an ecological doctrine of creation".<sup>115</sup> This book explores "the participation of the triune God through the Spirit's active presence within the world" and calls for our "respect for the created earth through an adoration

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<sup>115</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985).

of the triune God.”<sup>116</sup> What drives this ecological doctrine of creation is Moltmann’s insistence upon the intimate relationship between the pneumatic triune God and the creation. He claims that God “through his cosmic Spirit...is present *in* each of his creatures and *in* the fellowship of creation which they share” so that the universe may “become the home and dwelling place of God’s glory”.<sup>117</sup> The *perichoresis* of the Trinity is the archetype of the interpenetration of God and the world. The whole creation story involves the determination of the Creator Father, the sustaining indwelling of the life-Giver Spirit, and the perfecting salvation of the Messiah Son.<sup>118</sup> It tells the history of *God with us* leading to the Sabbath. By these ideas, Moltmann consciously avoids two trends of the orthodox understanding of creation in contemporary Reformed theology. One is the monotheistic emphasis on God as the one absolute subject over above the world; another is the Christological interpretation of creation and humanity focused on the person and work of Christ alone without sufficient horizontal reference.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Heather McDivitt, “Jürgen Moltmann: God in Creation”, Gifford Lectures website <http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPGDIC&Volume=0&Issue=0&Summary=True>, assessed November 15, 2012.

<sup>117</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 14, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Moltmann made this clear in the “Preface” with a statement that “I have dropped the earlier divisions of theology, which followed the pattern of the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed. Instead I have interwoven these three articles together in a Trinitarian sense so that I was able to develop a pneumatological doctrine of creation.” (*God in Creation*, xii.)

<sup>119</sup> The reasons why he intends to do so can be found in the beginning of this book. In the “Preface” he writes, “In the 1930s, the problem of the doctrine of creation was knowledge of God. Today the problem of the doctrine of God is knowledge of creation...Fifty years ago, discernment of the triune God revealed in Christ brought the church the assurance of faith; and today, in the same way, discernment of the God who is present in creation through his Holy Spirit can bring men and women to reconciliation and peace with nature. The salutary ‘Christological concentration’ in Protestant theology then, must be matched today by an

Moltmann calls our attention to an important truth that creation is a *resolve of God for Himself*.<sup>120</sup> The freely-willed act of bringing the world into being does not merely attest God's liberty and almightiness; more profoundly it attests a self-designation and self-identification of God, i.e. God determines for Himself to be the Creator and commits Himself to create. In order 'to let be' the world which is distinct from Him by its created nature, God withdraws Himself to make room for it. Moltmann emphasizes that it is God's self-withdrawing (rather than self-pouring or out-flowing) that initiates the creation.<sup>121</sup> Such a kenotic decision and action tells that in the first place creation is a gracious act of God "grounded in his humble, self-humiliating love."<sup>122</sup>

Moltmann also reminds us that God makes the world *for His glory* and *commits Himself in the relationship* with the world for this goal. Beneath the creaturely appearance of the world there is always a divine purpose which involves God Himself. The creation is never isolated or self-closed but always supported by

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extension of theology's horizon to cosmic breadth, so that it takes in the whole of God's creation." (*God in Creation*, xi-xii.) In the start of the first chapter he states, "As long as God was thought of as the absolute subject, the world had to be viewed as the object of his creation, preservation and redemption...Through the monotheism of the absolute subject, God was increasingly stripped of his connection with the world, and the world was increasingly secularized." (*God in Creation*, 1.)

<sup>120</sup> Moltmann emphasizes, "In a resolve, the author of the resolve acts on himself first of all. He resolves 'for himself' before he acts on anyone or anything else." (*God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, 217)

<sup>121</sup> For Moltmann, it "points to a necessary correction in the interpretation of creation: God does not create merely by calling something into existence, or by setting something afoot. In a more profound sense he 'creates' by letting-be, by making room, and by withdrawing himself." See *God in Creation*, 88.

<sup>122</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 88.

God and open to God. Its existence is oriented and driven by the consummation of God's glory in it. How does this happen? Moltmann points out that, "God the Spirit is also the Spirit of the universe, its total cohesion, its structure, its information, its energy."<sup>123</sup> Even after the Fall, the Spirit still indwells the creation to maintain its existence.<sup>124</sup> Despite the radical result of sin, the Spirit "turns creation's history of suffering into a history of hope."<sup>125</sup> This transformation is presented in Scripture as the history of God's promise.<sup>126</sup> Events and experiences in this promissory history are determined by what happens from God's side. "Whatever happens from God's side has a certain direction, pointing from creation at the beginning to the eternal kingdom."<sup>127</sup> The indwelling of the Spirit in creation signifies the immanent presence of God as well as the self-transcending motion of creation toward the eternal kingdom.<sup>128</sup> In this double sense, "the universe cannot be viewed as a closed

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<sup>123</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 16.

<sup>124</sup> Moltmann argues that, "If the world were completely and wholly godless and forsaken by the Spirit, it would have become nothing (Ps. 104.29); it would have ceased to exist. But the world does exist, even if it is not in a condition that could be said to be in accordance with God. So in the suffering history of the world of nature and human being, we have to discern the inexpressible sighings of the indwelling Spirit, and the suffering presence of God." (*God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, 102)

<sup>125</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 102.

<sup>126</sup> Here Moltmann also brings out a new concept of time. Rather than a linear, temporal continuum, "time" is "the repetition of eternity" about what God has willed and promised. See *God in Creation*, 124-132.

<sup>127</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 124.

<sup>128</sup> The synchronization of the historical time and natural time is another insight projected by Moltmann in his ecological doctrine of creation. See *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, 137-139. Some points will be involved in later part of this essay.

system...[but] as a system that is open – open for God and for his future.”<sup>129</sup> The comprehension of creation comes from the whole story that integrates the beginning and the end.

In this story, the most distinctive part is God’s making humankind in the *imago Dei*. Moltmann points out that God creates humankind with a self-exhortation.<sup>130</sup> Before bringing humankind into being, God resolves for Himself in eternity that His own image will be manifested within these creaturely beings. By such a special resolve, God puts Himself in a particular relationship with humankind in all its human existence. It implies that “[God] himself is drawn into the history of these creatures of his.”<sup>131</sup> To understand humanity as the *imago Dei* also requires that we integrate its origin with its destiny through the history of God with human beings. This particularly means that “although we shall begin with a theological exposition of the Old Testament’s creation accounts, we shall illuminate this interpretation from the messianic gospel of Christ, and shall therefore relate the original designation of human beings to their final glorification in the kingdom of God.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 103.

<sup>130</sup> See Genesis 1.26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, ...’.” (NRSV) Moltmann explains, “The word which precedes the resolve is addressed by God to himself. It is a self-exhortation. ... In the self-exhortation we have here, God designates himself to be the Creator of his image before he creates that image.” (*God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, 217)

<sup>131</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 217. Therefore, talking about the history in which human beings exist, Moltmann prefers the phrase “God’s history with human beings”. See *God in Creation*, 225, 233.

<sup>132</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 216.



Moltmann stresses that God is always Trinitarian and pneumatic. Regarding the whole vision of creation directed towards the consummation of God's glory in it, he states: in the operation of the Spirit, "the creation of the Father through the Son and the reconciliation of the world with God through Christ arrive at their goal."<sup>133</sup> For Moltmann, the creation must be rooted in the cosmic Trinity. The Trinitarian efficacy includes the first creating action of the Father, the constant indwelling of the Spirit and the eschatological redemption of the Son. Moreover, the cosmic Spirit establishes a unitary relationship between God and the world. While the world is virtually distinct from God, it is united with God at the same time. By the power of the Spirit, God dwells in the creation and the creation exists in God. Moltmann describes this as a "mutual interpenetration" which is analogous to the relations within the Trinity.<sup>134</sup> Under the mutual interpenetration principle, the God-world relationship reflects the Trinitarian *perichoresis* in the cosmological domain.

### **5.3.3.2 How Moltmann May Complement Torrance**

Comparing Moltmann with Torrance, we see some similar insights – for instance, the creative love of God, the openness of the creation, the unitary relation of God and the world, although these are expounded in a different way. The similarity in difference shows that Moltmann's Trinitarian perspective is distinct from yet nonetheless

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<sup>133</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 96.

<sup>134</sup> Moltmann indicates, "all relationships which are analogous to God reflect the primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the Trinitarian perichoresis: God *in* the world and the world *in* God; heaven and earth *in* the kingdom of God, pervaded by his glory; soul and body united *in* the life-giving Spirit to a human whole; woman and man *in* the kingdom of unconditional and unconditioned love, freed to be true and complete human beings." See *God in Creation*, 17.

harmonious with Torrance's Christocentric perspective. From the Trinitarian perspective, Moltmann perceives an open creation in unitary relation to a loving God without attaching too much weight at this point to the significance of incarnation. It suggests a resolution of the difficulty that we find in the Christocentric doctrine of creation, i.e. unless the incarnation takes place, God's love in creation and His unitary relation with the creation cannot be recognized and secured.

Moltmann emphasizes in the same breath the creative resolve of God (the Father), the immanent presence of the Spirit and the incarnational salvation of Christ (the Son). For him, everything about creation is fundamentally rooted in God's creative resolve made in eternity. As the world is created *to Himself* and *for His glory*, God unfalteringly puts Himself in a unitary relationship with what He creates through the cosmic Spirit. To a considerable extent, Moltmann puts away the idea that incarnation is *the* moment of God's breaking into the world and history.<sup>135</sup> Instead, God is *ever* immanently indwelling in the world and directly involved in history since the beginning. His stronger pneumatological account of creation enables a more explicit affirmation of God's presence in and commitment to created reality in all of its diverse manifestations. The bond between God and the world is never indirect but always *direct* and *intrinsic*. In this sense, the incarnation does not mean a completely new relationship of the God-world unity by which the contingent world finally is secured from annihilation. It is rather a new appearance and the climax of the God-

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<sup>135</sup> As we have seen in Torrance's Christology, incarnation is emphasized to be a completely new event that God breaks into the human existence and history. God stays in a kind of *indirect* bond with the world *till* the incarnation.

world unity which has been always there sustaining contingent being. Before the incarnation, creation has been under sufficient providence and security from the loving God who determines to humble Himself and commit in relation with the world. It is God's self-resolve in eternity and His self-involvement ever since the beginning that give the ultimate explanation and security to the existence of the world. But this does not diminish the significance of the Christ event. For Moltmann, the original creation necessarily and already points to the ultimate glorification of God on earth, which is eschatologically prefigured in Christ. The intrinsic connection between God's creation and God's glory affirms the significance of Christ's cosmic salvation in the whole creation story. Moltmann acknowledges it, nevertheless, not so much in terms of Christo-centricity but in the language of messianic fulfillment.

## **Summary**

This chapter has pointed to the rich implications of Torrance's doctrine of creation for his understanding of theological anthropology. We have seen how his description of contingent reality in relation to God serves to identify ways in which the human creature can be considered both primarily dependent upon God but also in a secondary sense independent of God. This dialectic of dependence and independence, which characterizes the created world as a whole, is reflected particularly in human identity and provides scope for responsible creaturely activity in response to God. Moreover, the purpose of creation as the reflection of God's primary wisdom and love is of anthropological significance with respect to our role as 'priests of creation'. Although

this idea is not fully developed by Torrance, it appears to be integral to his doctrine of creation and full of possibility for further exploration. Finally, the Christocentric Word in whom the true image of God is expressed is also the Word and Wisdom by which the world was created. Christ himself assumes our creaturely condition. This is significant for understanding redemption not as a separation or escape from creation but as its renewal in Christ. Here the creation is eternally affirmed against forces of sin and nothingness. While not all of these points are fully developed by Torrance, they indicate some positive directions for contemporary theological anthropology. These can be fruitfully developed in conversation with the more pneumatological and ecological approach of theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Thomas F. Torrance is a theologian engaged with both the old orthodoxy and the new orthodoxy in theology. He draws upon the rich heritage of the Church fathers and Calvin. But he also reveals the strong influence of Karl Barth. Doing theology in the twentieth century, he is aware that “We live in an era of sharp theological conflict and yet of genuine advance.”<sup>1</sup> And he believes that “we (can) actually engage in a critical and scientific approach to the basic forms of theological thinking and are ready for positive reconstruction in accordance with them.”<sup>2</sup> For him, the critical and scientific approach is the Christocentrism of Barth but understood in conversation with the Church fathers and the Reformers, especially John Calvin. Therefore, what he intends is a reconstruction of traditional theology but through a more developed modern epistemology. His anthropology reflects and demonstrates this effort at reconstruction. Although he has never summarized his anthropology, we will attempt a brief summary before offering a final critical assessment.

#### 6.1 A Summary of Torrance’s Anthropology

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology In Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology In Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 10.

There are three important things to represent in Torrance's anthropology. First, his anthropology is set in the relational framework of a God-human unity in Christ. Torrance firmly rejects dualism.<sup>3</sup> He emphasizes the incarnation as God's embracing of humankind into a unity with Him. It manifests the supreme unitary relation between God and humankind. This relation is established by the act of God in His grace. The initiative comes from God's side. Nevertheless, our human subjectivity is also affirmed in this movement of God towards us. The incarnation affirms our humanity and discloses its true identity. For Torrance, this relationship cannot be a one-way connection but must contain bidirectional dynamics between two active subjects, i.e. God and humankind. His relational framework therefore differs from the "subject God vs. object humankind" type. It established the human being as a subject, albeit in a secondary mode, *under* God and *within* the God-human unity.

Second, Torrance's anthropology radiates from his consistent concentration on the person of Christ. For Torrance, Christ not only reveals the authentic knowledge of God in his oneness with the Father, but also discloses an authentic knowledge of human nature in his vicarious humanity. Moreover, Christ embodies in his person the unitary relation between God and humankind. His hypostatic union is the source of our knowledge of the God-human relationship. These three aspects together form

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<sup>3</sup> With respect to the God-human relationship, his criticism of modern theology since the 18<sup>th</sup> century often targets the God-world dualism as it was influenced by ancient philosophy. But this does not mean that theology before the 18<sup>th</sup> century was monolithically dualist. Nevertheless, under the influence of Platonic philosophy, dualist emphases are often found in theology before the modern age, namely, the ontological division between the Deity of substance and the world of phenomena, and consequently between mind and body or spirit and material etcetera. Much of Torrance's suspicion of Augustine is attributable to a perceived dualism in this thought.

Torrance's anthropological vision. It is in Christ that he sees the connection between knowing God and being human, the confirmation of the God-human unity, and the regeneration of humanity. Apart from Christ, these pillars of his anthropology would collapse.

Third, Torrance's anthropology is ultimately rooted in what Christ reveals about the Trinity. Torrance believes that our self-knowledge is reflexive of our God-knowledge. The Trinitarian being of God is the source that provides norms and principles to describe the human being. He perceives in the Trinity the archetype of being in relations, the reciprocal dynamics of *perichoresis*, and the imageless image. His doctrine of the Trinity actually provides the rationale that he applies to anthropology. Furthermore, he singles out the Father-Son relationship as the controlling index for theology and identifies God always as Father rather than Creator. It is finally the doctrine of the Trinity rather than the doctrine of creation that shapes his anthropology.

In short, Torrance presents a Christocentric anthropology which makes all knowledge of humankind derivative from the revelation of Christ and anchored in the person of Christ. It regards humanity as the *image* of God. To be God's image means that humanity dynamically reflects (the glory of) God through active obedience to God in the unitary God-human relationship established by Jesus Christ, with the goal of our being united to God through sharing the Father-Son relationship between God and Christ.

## 6.2 A Critical Assessment of Torrance's Anthropology

The most appropriate way to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Torrance's anthropology is to situate it in the broader context of the writings of the Church fathers, Calvin and Barth. In this way, we can view its development of key anthropological insights from the patristic and Reformed traditions, as well as its adjustments of these. Unless we can see what he has done in this historical context, we cannot see clearly the repair work he intended. So also, unless we see the inevitable struggles and tensions of his work in this context, we cannot understand the unfinished business remaining within his theological anthropology.

### 6.2.1 Strengths

We find the strengths of Torrance's anthropology on two fronts. On the one side, Torrance's anthropology gathers the best of the theologies of the Fathers, Calvin and Barth and makes some insightful developments of these.

First, Torrance comprehends patristic Christology and excavates its meaning for anthropology through exploring the significance of Christ's humanity. Christ's identity, i.e. the two natures in one person, is the marrow of patristic theology. When the Church fathers fought against heretical interpretations of Christ, their main focus fell upon understanding Christ as *the incarnate God*. Torrance fully comprehends this incarnational basis of Christian theology. As he inherits the patristic teaching, he further identifies Christ as *the vicarious human being*. That is to say, Jesus Christ is not only the God who became a real man, but also *the* man who stands in the place of



all human beings. This provides the direct foundation for examining the nature of *our humanity* according to the act and being of God Himself. The patristic concepts of *homoousion*, *hypostatic* union, *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* together disclose the whole new relationship between God and humankind established in the person of Christ. Moreover, besides the redemptive death of Christ, the *life* of this vicarious human being is also salvific in terms of its correcting and regenerating humanity ontologically. To this extent, Torrance's development of patristic Christology is anthropologically freighted with meaning.

Second, Torrance advances Calvin's idea of understanding humanity always in relation to our knowledge of God. This is presented dynamically in terms of reflecting God in every sphere of human life and activity. In Calvin's theology, we find a relational and dynamic angle that distinguishes humanity by its unique reflection of God's glory. However, Calvin does not offer much illustration of what this entails. Torrance, however, offers some development of the notion. He not only highlights the relational connection between God-knowledge and self-knowledge, he also uncovers the dynamic content of human reflection of God's image, through the Reformed teaching on Christ's *active obedience*. Christ's disclosure of our human identity, and therefore of the divine image, resides in his *actively obeying* God. In this way, the notion of the reflection of God's glory is Christologically inflected in Torrance. This

represents an important step forward in Reformed anthropology, although Torrance tends to present it primarily from a soteriological perspective.<sup>4</sup>

Third, Torrance absorbs Barth's Christocentrism for knowing God and promotes its significance for knowing humankind. Barth insightfully perceives the special revelation of God Himself in Christ and asserts its unique validity for anchoring the knowledge of God. Torrance well understands the value of Barth's Christocentrism and uses it to anchor the knowledge of humanity as well. Torrance's Christocentric anthropology is not explained by the solidarity theory and model theory, i.e. Christ is in solidarity with us and so gives us a perfect model. Rather profoundly, it is explained by the fact that all of humanity really is *embodied* in the vicarious person of Christ through his life, death and resurrection. This fact is the cornerstone of the *objective* knowledge of humankind, for instance, the objective condemnation of sin in flesh and the objective reconciliation of humanity to God. To this extent, we must recognize that Torrance extended Barthian epistemology into the realm of anthropology, perhaps even more so than Barth himself.

On the other side, Torrance's anthropology avoids some shortcomings in the theologies of the Fathers, Calvin and Barth. To a certain extent, it offers some meaningful correction of the defects in their anthropology.

First, Torrance amends the static understanding of humanity that prevails in patristic theology. The static interpretation of the *imago Dei* leans upon the

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<sup>4</sup> What this comment means will be clarified more clearly in the last section as we review some of the shortcomings in Torrance's anthropology.

endowment of reason in the human mind. Its shortcoming is mainly reflected by the dualistic understanding of body and soul.<sup>5</sup> Torrance recognizes the dualistic hazard and rejects dualism clearly. His interpretation of the *imago Dei* as the human's dynamic reflection of God abandons the earlier focus on a substantial and static property. Instead, it regards the human being, as Jesus Christ manifests himself, as a *living integrity* of body and soul in a *dynamic relationship* to God. To focus on the dynamic relation rather than a static substance, Torrance eliminates the influence of Hellenistic ontology in traditional Christian anthropology and supports an advanced anthropology which views the human being as a psychosomatic whole. In this sense, he makes a significant correction to patristic theology in accordance with the holism of much modern theological anthropology.

Second, Torrance avoids the inconsistent depiction of humanity that appears in Calvin's theology. Calvin has both static and dynamic perspectives so that he talks of the rational endowment in our creaturely status as well as our inevitable alienation from God after the Fall. The former corresponds to the knowledge of God in the creation story and the latter corresponds to the knowledge of God in the salvation story.<sup>6</sup> Torrance is convinced that the two stories are one *in Christ*, therefore he

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<sup>5</sup> Under Hellenistic influence, the ancient fathers incline towards an ontology of substance with dualist implications.. In order to define humanity as the *imago Dei*, it has to identify some substance within or identical to the human being that is alike to God. Reason hence is singled out and affirmed as the peculiar possession of human nature in the likeness of God, i.e. the *imago Dei* intrinsically and substantially imprinted in human being. However, this way of interpreting humanity hardly resists the temptation to divinize human reason and exalt the human soul, which is "the seat of reason", as immortal. It consequently introduces a dualist split between the physical body and the intellectual soul.

<sup>6</sup> To be fair to Calvin, the inconsistent depiction of humanity in the *Institutes* is not a fundamental self-contradiction but a difficulty in harmonizing the two perspectives of creation

consciously picks the latter to establish his anthropology. In other words, he chooses the dynamic perspective as the dominant angle to view humanity and puts down the static perspective without canceling it.<sup>7</sup> In so doing, Torrance acknowledges Calvin's double teaching on humanity, but he also prioritizes one to avoid any competition by setting them in a simple juxtaposition.

Third, Torrance attempts to offset the repression of human subjectivity in Barth's theology. Barth's theology plays a significant role in correcting anthropocentric theology. However, when defending God's absolute subjectivity in relation to humankind, it arguably constrains the space in which we can talk more positively about human subjectivity and activity.<sup>8</sup> Torrance covers this lacuna with his

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and salvation. That is why Mary Potter Engel uses the word "perspectival" to illustrate Calvin's anthropology. See refer to Edward Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1952), and Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> As we see in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Torrance, in the opening three chapters, acknowledges humankind as the particular *imago Dei* with a unique responsibility to God through the power of intelligence. This intelligence-based *imago Dei* is affirmed in the context of God's creation. From Chapter 4 onwards, nevertheless, he shifts to the other side, i.e. humankind's alienation from God and Christ's reparation of human nature. The remaining chapters are orientated towards this setting. While he does not ignore Calvin's teaching on humanity in creation, his principal effort is to interpret Calvin's anthropology from the perspective of salvation.

<sup>8</sup> As McGrath outlines, for Barth, humanity is only in the position of object while God remains subject. This is to be explained by the revolt against liberal theology. Barth's fierce disagreement with Brunner actually relates to this issue of human subjectivity, for Brunner affirms humanity as a subject, too, although God is affirmed as subject in advance. See to Alister E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 105-106. On the other hand, more recent readings of Barth have stressed the extent to which he sees ethical action as a proper human response to God. See John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995). McGrath's criticism now seems in need of qualification at the very least.

emphasis on the *active* obedience of Christ in his vicarious *human life*.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis gives a bold assertion to the subjective responsibility from the human side, while maintaining God's initiative and ultimate position as subject.<sup>10</sup> It enriches our understanding of humanity according to God's own will, grace and action. In other words, the vicarious human being is God Himself; it is God Himself who personally reveals and affirms the subjectivity of humanity. This anthropological dimension in Christ's special revelation is arguably neglected by Barth. Torrance, nonetheless, brings it out, particularly in his sacramental theology. To this extent, this anthropology is positioned rather differently and more positively than that of Barth in key respects.

### **6.2.2 Weaknesses**

Alongside all the strengths mentioned above, we also find some weak points in Torrance's anthropology.

Generally speaking, Torrance's anthropology is over-layered by Christological themes, particularly when he discusses our knowledge of God. This constrains the scope for theological anthropology to address more adequately the complexity of humankind. It also creates difficulties for those seeking communicating the Christian

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<sup>9</sup> For Torrance, this constitutes a necessary part of Christ's salvific ministry which is always vicarious and directed towards others.

<sup>10</sup> Due to its vicarious nature, Christ's humanity is always active for our sake. Yet this in no way derogates from the priority of God's subjectivity, particularly when we consider the importance of the *anhypostasia* for Torrance. We cannot talk of human subjectivity except with reference to the vicarious humanity in Christ.

understanding of human nature to people who have no concept of “Christ” at all in their cultures.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Torrance’s anthropology raises various questions and issues which need further clarification. First of all, *theosis* or deification of humanity is often leveled as a criticism of his strong notion of our soteriological union with Christ. As Torrance subsumes talk of humanity under his account of Christ the incarnate Son, he appears thereby to have transposed the relationship between God and humankind to the same relational level as that between the Father and the Son. In this situation, humanity still could be deified by making the God-human relation ultimately equal to the God-God relation, despite his refusal to equate human and divine being.

Second, reason and conscience are remain unresolved issues in Torrance’s anthropology. As Torrance criticizes any static account of what makes us human, he also tends to surrender the traditional affirmation of reason and conscience which have a positive significance for human identity even after the Fall. In his theology, Torrance omits the topic of conscience, but he talks about reason a good deal. However, his arguments about reason have a gap to fill. On the one side, he claims that God is rational and that the Spirit is the source of all rationality. Created reason is grounded in and reflects the uncreated reason (i.e. the divine reason). On the other side, he asserts that reason has nothing to do with the reception of God’s revelation. There is

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<sup>11</sup> For example, traditional Chinese culture has a profound understanding of human nature although it has no concept of “Christ”. To initiate a dialogue which introduces a Christian understanding of humanity to Chinese culture, we cannot employ Torrance’s anthropology in a ready or straightforward manner. As Christology is totally foreign to them, the dialogue needs some preparative themes other than Christ – for instance, the value and limit of human reason – to establish a conversation.

no “point of contact” between the human and the divine. Whether reason endows us with particular spiritual capacities seems ambiguous at this point. This does not mean that Torrance is wrong in describing the perverted function of reason after the Fall, but he requires to offer further clarification of the relation between reason and the action of the Spirit in his anthropology.

Third, the horizontal dimension of human life is rather muted, if not absent, in Torrance’s anthropology. Focusing on the God-human relationship in Christ, Torrance mainly examines humanity in a vertical dimension, i.e. in our responding to God. He rarely talks about the interpersonal relationship between human fellows or expounds the horizontal dimension of human life in society, e.g. in the context of social justice. As for the relationship between humankind and the vast created world, Torrance has the idea that human beings are priests of creation, but he does not give this important notion the development it requires.<sup>12</sup> This weakens the power of his anthropology to contribute to significant ethical and ecological issues.

These weak points, missing elements and unanswered questions ultimately derive from a fundamental problem which afflicts Christian theology more broadly, that is, how to correlate accounts of creation and salvation. For the Church fathers and Calvin, these are parallel but not separated, and together they depict the God-human relationship. For Barth, they are integrated by a subordinated relationship in which salvation subdues creation and dominates the whole narrative of the God-human

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<sup>12</sup> The horizontal dimension matters significantly in the whole story of God’s relation with humankind, as we see in the Bible. It should be considered also as a determining factor in any consideration of what is meant by the image of God.

relationship. Epistemologically, Torrance sympathizes with Barth; but doctrinally, he values those teachings on humanity which the Church fathers and Calvin expressed in the context of creation. Therefore, he compresses anthropology into Christology and promotes the dynamic perspective only. The method itself has reflected his effort at finding a way through patterns of traditional and modern thinking in theology.

In conclusion, Torrance's anthropology is like the gold hidden in the rich ore. It needs to be unearthed and grasped from a study of his wider theology in which he integrates patristic, Reformed and Barthian approaches. The main contribution of his anthropology resides in its stress upon a dynamic interpretation of humanity in a relationship of correspondence to God. By such a dynamic and relational vision, Torrance helps us see that the *imago Dei* is not a property we can take for granted; rather, it is the life that we should live out in response to the love of God in Christ. Although there are defects in this kind of interpretation of humanity, we can acknowledge his work as contributing to one of the most significant developments in Christian anthropology.



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